

The Ball State University Honors College Oral History Project: Lessons & Reflections

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

History is sometimes portrayed as a dry, uninteresting subject. In a society that has much to look forward to, why would we want to spend time looking back? But people who argue this are missing the point—studying history is the exact reason we are able to understand our present and plan for the future. This is what the Ball State University Honors College Oral History Project team set out to do in the Spring 2019 semester. The ten student team members conducted three video-recorded interviews each with prominent current and former Honors College faculty and staff and notable alumni. The end product is the first university record to tell a complete story of the Ball State Honors College. These recorded interviews will be permanently archived in the University Libraries' Digital Media Repository, along with transcripts produced by the student interviewers and hired transcribers.

Acknowledgements

First, I want to thank my thesis advisor and project director, Professor Michael W. Doyle. I'm grateful you spent your last semester before retirement guiding our class in making an extraordinary oral history of the Honors College.

I also want to thank my fellow team members: Emma Cieslik, Hannah Gunnell, Jocelyn Hall, Anna Hawk, Melissa Kraman, Noah Nobbe, Elise Schrader, Erica Smith, Ben Wilson, and assistant project director Nathan Rivers. Our project was enriched by everyone's individual efforts.

Third, thank you to my three interviewees, Professor Timothy Berg, Professor Lisa Driver, and Professor Jason Powell. I enjoyed hearing your stories and unique perspectives.

Lastly, I want to thank my parents, Marsha and John, for their unending support throughout my college education. You made even the hardest parts a little better.

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Process Analysis

I. Project description

The Ball State University Honors College Oral History Project was conducted in 2019, the sixtieth anniversary year of the Honors College. Before the completion of this oral history collection, there were no university records that fully told the history of the Honors College in such breadth or depth. The project includes interviews, up to two hours in length each, with thirty-four current and former Honors College administrators, staff, faculty, and alumni. Ten Honors College students conducted these interviews over a two-week period in the Spring 2019 semester to uncover the legacy of the college. The first half of the semester was dedicated to reading and discussing collegiate honors education, the first one hundred years of Ball State, the history of the Ball State Honors College, and oral history techniques. Our resulting research was compiled into a PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix A), an Honors College timeline poster (see Appendix B), and a timeline on the honors education movement in the United States (see Appendix C) that were shared at three showcases: the 2019 Mid-East Honors Association Conference, our independent project showcase, and the Office of Immersive Learning Showcase. Individually, the students also prepared detailed timelines and background research for each of their three interviewees, in order to conduct interviews. Those students who were using this project as material for their senior honors thesis later transcribed two of those interviews (the other students transcribed one), with additional transcripts being completed by a for-hire transcriptionist. The videos and transcriptions can all be found on Ball State University's Digital Media Repository at <https://dmr.bsu.edu/digital/collection/BSUHrsColOrl>. Additionally, a

student-produced 20-minute documentary about the project and our interviewees will be available on the repository.

II. Pre-Interview

Our semester began with what was essentially a seven-week crash course on Ball State and collegiate honors. We developed our subject matter knowledge by reading materials that covered the history of Ball State, the history of the Ball State Honors College, and the history of modern American collegiate honors education. The team also attended workshops that addressed different methodologies: archival research, both of individuals and institutions, as well as oral history research. By educating ourselves on these topics, we were able to give context to the interviews we would later conduct and abide by the proper guidelines.

This research was a perfect way to top off my college career. Reading *Ball State University: An Interpretive History* by Anthony Edmonds and E. Bruce Geelhoed¹ showed me a side of Ball State I had never encountered. Before this class, I did not have the necessary tools to appreciate the richness of our university's story. I gained an understanding of my professors, fellow students, and education that I had not previously possessed. Because this book only covered the university's history up to 2001, we invited Geelhoed, a Ball State history professor, to one of our class meetings to answer specific questions we had about the past two decades, which have no recorded history as detailed as the text. This class meeting was an exciting opportunity to learn more about Ball State from one of the experts.

Geelhoed was also involved with a text that covered the history of the Ball Honors House on campus, *1707 West Riverside: A History of the Edmund F. and Virginia B. Ball House and Its*

¹Anthony O. Edmonds and E. Bruce Geelhoed, *Ball State University: An Interpretive History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

People, 1935-Present, a senior honors thesis project of Alyssa R. Bennett.² We read this booklet, which gave information about the history of the house, its previous inhabitants, and some information about the Honors College. Another student-produced resource was from team member Ben Wilson, who compiled timelines of university history and significant dates of the Honors College.

Our research also included a reading of selected chapters in *An Adventure in Education: Swarthmore College Under Frank Aydelotte* by the Swarthmore College Faculty in 1941,³ and Frank Aydelotte's *Breaking the Academic Lock Step: The Development of Honors Work in American Colleges and Universities*.⁴ Swarthmore College is the home of the first modern American collegiate honors program, and Aydelotte was the university president to begin the program in September 1922. These books made apparent the desirability of honors for high-achieving students. I had never given much thought to what my education would have been like without honors or advanced classes, but the passion Aydelotte had for honors programs showed me what a loss it would be without them. In the Ball State Honors College, I experienced a liberal arts education within a state university. I didn't have to travel as far or pay as much money to be exposed to fascinating ideas and superior professors. The opportunity to participate in honors can certainly enrich a college experience, and I now know that first-hand.

After⁴ our readings, our class went a step further and actually visited Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania. This trip had a few different functions. It was partly a team-building exercise;

²Alyssa R. Bennett and E. Bruce Geelhoed, *1707 West Riverside: A History of the Edmund F. and Virginia B. Ball House and Its People, 1935-Present* (Muncie, Ind.: Ball State University, 2017).

³The Swarthmore College Faculty, *An Adventure in Education: Swarthmore College Under Frank Aydelotte* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1941).

⁴Frank Aydelotte, *Breaking the Academic Lock Step: The Development of Honors Work in American Colleges and Universities* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944).

we traveled in early February, and before that point hadn't had much time to get to know each other. Spending a weekend with my fellow team members was a great way to build strong relationships. We had to depend on each other to get around the city, choose activities, and decide on where to eat. These may all seem like small things, but we were all definitely closer once we got back to Muncie. It was after this trip that we truly felt like a cohesive immersive learning team.

Secondly, this trip was a way to enrich our minds with Philadelphia history, and thus, the intellectual history of our country. My fellow students and I visited locations such as the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall. We were able to think about and discuss the intellectual origins of the United States, which had an influence on the development of collegiate honors education. Throughout the class, we explored the ideas of prominent early America thinkers like Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, whose views on education were apparent in certain characteristics of modern universities and honors programs.

The other function of the trip was personally experiencing Swarthmore College. On Saturday, we spent the day meeting current Swarthmore honors students, current and past faculty, and the Honors Program director, Dr. Grace Ledbetter. Dr. Ledbetter gave us a campus tour and we visited the on-campus library archives to see materials from Frank Aydelotte. We also spent time socializing with our hosts during a lunch at a local restaurant. Afterwards, we participated in a seminar meant to expose us to the structure and philosophy of the Swarthmore Honors Program. During the seminar, we were able to gain another perspective on honors education. We compared our college with their program, and I was surprised to learn that there were components of the Ball State Honors College that the Swarthmore students desired for the

own program. For example, the students presented a project they had worked on, “The Swarthmore Honors Program Reimagined,” which indicated that they desire more hands-on, focused projects that resemble our Ball State honors colloquia. This experience showed me the uniqueness of honors at Ball State. The visit was also a great opportunity to discuss honors pedagogy with passionate honors advocates. Once again, I was shown how advantageous honors has been for me and the many students before me, and how advantageous it will be for the many students to come after me.

Another important reading we completed was *Doing Oral History* by Donald A. Ritchie.⁵ This guidebook answered many questions about the art of oral history research, interviewing, preservation, and application. Before this class, I was not aware that oral history is its own field of research. This discovery was exciting for me, because oral history is a historical research method with which I have come to feel comfortable. I have always had an interest in history, but was not so interested in the traditional historical research methods. By “doing oral history,” I found an exciting way to record and also create history using the communication skills I already possessed. I enjoyed personally engaging with the people who constructed the history we were trying to preserve.

Our class also participated in workshops meant to enhance our research skills, so we could apply our new knowledge and become fully immersed in the subject. The first of these workshops was held in the Bracken Library Schwartz Digital Complex and led by Sarah Allison, head of archives user engagement. The first workshop was an introduction to archival research. We learned about the various resources the library has to aid us in researching our

⁵Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (3rd edition; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

interviewees—the Digital Media Repository and the Archives and Special Collections—as well as archival research in general. Allison showed us different artifacts that are at our fingertips, like old issues of the *Ball State Daily News* and university yearbooks. Again, I became aware of a whole world of information to which I had never been exposed. I did not realize how many intricacies there were to archival research, but I became very interested in the vast amount of information the public has access to at the university library.

Another workshop we participated in was led by project director Professor Michael Doyle. This was his Oral History Methods Workshop, based on his personal experiences with oral history planning, research, and interviewing. During this lesson, I learned about the many small details that are hugely important when it comes to the field of oral history. For example, I discovered how crucial pre-planning is. While the student team members weren't as involved in the pre-planning given the timing of the semester, I was interested to see how much work has to go into an oral history project before the first interview. Creating a mission statement, identifying the appropriate interviewees, and securing funding are all important steps. With all that is involved in an oral history project, it is clear how passionate one must be to conceptualize and carry out such an endeavor.

Before we started the official interviewing, the student team members put our new skills to the test in practice interviews. The entire class observed as each student conducted ten minutes of interview with a volunteer. Five students interviewed Chris Reidy, a graphics production coordinator in University Media Services who has been previously involved with oral history projects on campus. The other five students interviewed Marquice Gee, a senior Honors College student who participated in the African-American Alumni Oral History Project, also led by

Professor Doyle. I spent my ten minutes interviewing Marquice, and this practice session made me feel more confident for the later interviews I would conduct. During our post-interview critique session the following week, the biggest lesson I gained was to work on my pacing. While Marquice's interview was shorter than the real ones would be, our in-class critique session of the interviews made it clear that I needed to focus on getting my interviewees to talk about the "good stuff"—their Honors College experience. I started to think about how I could uncover information about a person's life while still ultimately uncovering information about the Ball State Honors College.

Throughout all the reading, traveling, discussion, and practicing, I was also conducting research on my three interviewees. Each student interviewer had access to an interviewee biographical form, a resume or curriculum vitae, and pre-interview notes compiled by assistant project director, Nathan Rivers. These documents could be used as jumping-off points for further information. I used Ball State's Digital Media Repository for part of my additional research. Some of the more notable materials I found included old *Ball State Daily News* articles that mentioned two of my interviewees, and concert programs from the eighties that included the name of the third interviewee.

Typing the interviewees' names into Google yielded helpful results as well. I learned that one of my interviewees had published a book and found the personal blog of another. I could use all of this information to paint a picture of my interviewees, but I was also at a slight advantage because I already knew two of them quite well. My first and third interviewees were both professors I have had in the Ball State Honors College. I believe having this inside knowledge was extremely beneficial. While it would have been completely possible for a non-honors

student to conduct meaningful interviews in this project, having the actual experience of being an honors student at Ball State inspired me to ask deeper questions and helped me be naturally curious about the subject matter at hand.

The most important document I produced in preparation for my interviews was the question and topic list for each session. This helped me keep track of what I wanted to talk about in the interviews. The lists were in chronological order, beginning with the interviewee's birthplace and childhood, leading up to the present day.

III. Interviewing

On Friday, March 22, the team began our interviews, which were conducted in the Oral History Workshop Studio on the second floor of the Burkhardt Building on Ball State University's campus. Members of Digital Corps, a student-run partner to the Ball State Office of Information Technology, handled the technical aspects of 31 of our interviews, such as microphone and camera set-up. A student team made up of three of our own project members handled technical support for the two practice interviews and one additional interview. Up to 4 interviews were conducted each day for two weeks. Every interview was overseen by a supervisor, either Professor Doyle or Nathan Rivers (and once, Chris Reidy), who kept an interview log and time codes so that we could later identify themes and sound bites from the seventy hours of recorded interviews, which would be included in our final documentary.

I interviewed two current Honors College faculty members, Professor Jason Powell and Professor Timothy Berg, in addition to a 1988 Ball State Honors College alumna, Professor Lisa Driver, who teaches in the theology department at Valparaiso University. Team members had the ability to choose which interviewees we were most interested in interviewing. Some

consideration was put toward similarities between interviewer and interviewee—for example, if the two had the same major or same career interests. Otherwise, we could pick who we interviewed on a first-come, first-served basis.

I selected Professor Berg and Professor Powell simply because I had prior experience with each of them. I have had classes with them in the Honors College and was interested in digging deeper into their lives and stories. This was an excellent opportunity to know my professors on a different level. Later on, they both mentioned how being interviewed by me, a non-stranger, helped them feel more comfortable in the interview. This helped me feel more at ease as well. My other interviewee, Professor Driver, was a stranger to me, but part of the reason I was interested in interviewing her was her long academic history. I wanted to know more about her extensive schooling, research, and broad interests.

The interviewee list was largely informed by our four project advisors: Honors College Dean John Emert, former honors Dean Warren Vanderhill, Bruce Geelhoed, and Barb Stedman, Director of National and International Scholarships and Honors Fellow. These four people were able to designate the best interviewees for our project; that is, who would provide the best information to create a cohesive information collection about the Honors College and its first sixty years. The goal was to interview all living deans, secretaries to the deans, advisors, significant faculty that were representative of the Honors College, and two alumni per decade. These goals were largely accomplished. After project director Professor Doyle and assistant project director Nathan Rivers mailed out sixty invitations in the fall 2018 semester, thirty people accepted. The additional four interviews included our two practice interviews, Professor Doyle's interview of Warren Vanderhill, and Nathan Rivers' interview of alumna Mary Posner.

In the end, I learned even more than I thought I would in these interviews. Each person had ideas on certain topics to which I had never been exposed. These interviews were meant to cover a person's entire life, with a special emphasis on how their experiences intersect with the Honors College. This gave me the opportunity to explore subjects deeply and in a focused manner.

Professor Berg's interview was on March 28, 2019. He is an associate teaching professor for the Honors College and has been at Ball State since 2003. With his deep interest in honors education and pedagogy, I was able to uncover a wealth of information from Professor Berg. He showed me how much thought really goes into the classes of the Honors College. During our conversation, I became quite proud of the college I had been a part of for the past four years. Over time, it can become easy to take things for granted—Professor Berg's passion for innovation within the classroom reminded me that the Ball State Honors College should not be taken for granted.

My interview with Professor Driver was on April 1, 2019. The impact of her honors education is still on the forefront of her mind, even thirty-one years after graduation. Professor Driver found a community within the Honors College and her fellow Whiting Scholars. Religion has always been very important in her life, and she almost did not go to the secular Ball State because she and her family was worried what an education without a focus on religion would look like. However, Professor Driver never ended up regretting her decision. The Ball State Honors College enabled her to create her own specialized major in Medieval Studies. She was able to follow her passions at Ball State, which led her down a path to become a theology professor at Valparaiso University.

My third and final interview was on April 3, 2019, with Professor Powell. Like his colleague and good friend Professor Berg, Professor Powell is heavily invested in the development of honors education. His path was an interesting one—before pursuing a master’s and PhD, Professor Powell first attended a small Bible college in Michigan and served as a pastor. He was almost 30 years old when he completely turned away from religion, though in the two decades since, he has slowly found his way back. Professor Powell’s perspectives on knowledge and intellectual pursuit were enlightening.

Reflecting on my performance as an interviewer, I was quite satisfied with how the process went. It was helpful that I have interviewing experience—I participated in student and professional journalism for about six years, so I knew the basics of gathering information and asking insightful questions. What was different about the oral history interviews was their breadth. When I have interviewed subjects for a news article, it was always to get more information on one very specific topic. For this project, the topic was a person’s entire life, with a focus on the Ball State Honors College. There was a huge amount of information to cover in two hours, and I wavered back and forth between worrying about whether there would be too much content or too little. In the end, using the topic and question list and spending more time on the Honors College and less time on other subjects proved to be efficient and effective. I successfully asked questions “on the behalf of posterity,” as Professor Doyle would say, and covered topics that were not only of interest to me but would be of interest to someone years from now watching the recorded interviews and reading the transcripts.

IV. Post-Interview

The most monumental task I had to complete after the interviews was transcribing. I transcribed my interviews with Professor Berg and Professor Powell.

On April 4, 2019, our class met once again in the Bracken Library Schwartz Digital Complex with Sarah Allison. She led an oral history transcription workshop for the team. We reviewed common transcription issues and the proper formatting for an oral history transcription. In preparation for the workshop, we read the *Baylor University Institute for Oral History Style Guide*.⁶ This is considered the standard handbook on oral history transcription in the field. The style guide and workshop were two integral resources in preparation for transcribing, because even the smallest details matter. For example, I learned to usually default to using em dashes within a transcript. This made the process less stressful, because my interviewees didn't always speak in complete sentences and the em ⁶dashes made that easier to understand.

Two of the most crucial details we had to learn concerned crutch words and time codes. Crutch words include "uh," "like," and "you know." The style guide dictates that transcriptionists can include no more than two crutch words on a page, even if the interviewee used more than that. This is to ensure clarity for the reader and less of a headache for the transcriptionist. Time codes also are used for clarity and ease of reading. Allison told us that transcriptionists are expected to include one-minute time codes throughout the entire transcription. This was an important piece of information, because I don't think any of the students were expecting this. At first, inserting time codes for every minute of interview sounded like a largely unnecessary task. I couldn't believe we would need to do that so often. Once I began transcribing, however, I realized how much could be said in one minute and how helpful

⁶Baylor University Institute for Oral History. *Style Guide: A Quick Reference for Editing Oral History Transcripts*. Baylor University Institute for Oral History.

the time codes were for me and for future readers. Knowing the style guidelines for these factors and for punctuation, numbers, and dates ensured that I created transcripts that are readable and useful for others.

V. Connecting this project to my intended career field

The ten student team members divided into three groups to split various project responsibilities. The video production team assisted the Digital Corps in filming our interviews and produced a 20-minute documentary about our project. The history and hospitality team compiled necessary research for the project and coordinated our interviewees' schedules. The events planning and promotion team, of which I was a member, created posters, flyers, presentations, and invitations (see Appendix D) for the Mid-East Honors Association Conference and our two project showcases on April 29—one specifically for our project and another with the Ball State Office of Immersive Learning. We also planned the agenda for the project showcase.

With my intended career field being marketing and communications, my membership of the events planning and promotion team enriched my professional development. The tasks this group had to undertake will be helpful experiences as I move on into the professional world. I gained experience with researching unfamiliar topics and compiling information, as well as developing rapport with people of a different generation and of different perspectives. I foresee that my career will involve me doing these very things—creating written material meant for the public, speaking with multiple people to learn new information, and exploring topics more in-depth.

VI. The epitome of my Honors College experience

I cannot think of a better way to end my college career than by being a member of the Ball State University Honors College Oral History Project. Our exploration of collegiate honors education and Ball State history showed me what a vibrant community I have been a part of for the past four years. Before this project, I did not realize the significant contributions that had been made over decades by dedicated, passionate people; contributions that were put into place so people like me could thrive for years to come. I am thankful I could participate in the project and gain this new perspective.


After personally hearing the interviews from Professor Berg, Professor Powell, Professor Driver, Marquice, and Chris, I have a different sense about what it is like to be an Honors College student at Ball State. I am truly part of something bigger than myself, something that is very influential and life-changing for many. This makes graduation more poignant and sentimental, which is a feeling I will have for a while.

My participation in this project has also made me more curious in general. Involving myself with history in this way sparked my interest in other stories. I have been thinking that I may even need to start interviewing everyone in my own life, because the project emphasized to me how important it is to record the history of people and places. Luckily for me, this experience also helped me become a better conversationalist. I have always heard that it's better to be a good listener than good talker, and my oral history interviews were evidence of this statement. This project was good practice in listening deeply, identifying what people are passionate about, and following up on that. Overall, I have become a more avid learner and explorer, which are characteristics I want to carry on for the rest of my life.

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Appendix A



Ball State University Honors College Oral History Project, 1959 to the Present


Project Showcase & Documentary Premiere
Ball State University, 29 April 2019






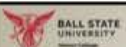
Project Mission Statement

- Commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Ball State University Honors College (BSUHC)
- Study the history of:
 - Ball State University (1918-2019)
 - Ball State University Honors College (1959-2019)
 - Honors education movement in the U.S. (1873-2019)
 - With special attention to its inception at Swarthmore College (1922)
- Learn how to conduct oral history
 - Archival Research
 - Interviewing




Project Mission Statement

- Conduct 34 two-hour interviews with Honors College administrators, staff, faculty, and alumni representing each of the six decades of cohorts
- Analyze Honors College's impact on each interviewee's personal life and career
- Compile first-ever comprehensive timeline of BSUHC from its inception to present based on archival research and the memories of interviewees
- Fortify Ball State's growing Digital Media Repository (DMR) by adding an extensive collection of oral history records covering the Ball State University Honors College


Curricular Design and Student Responsibility: Learning Stages

- Traditional lecture and discussion-based classroom (first half of semester)
 - Focus on learning history of Ball State University, Ball State University Honors College, Evolution of Honors education in the U.S.
 - Guest presentation from Bruce Geelhoed, co-author of *Ball State University: An Interpretive History* (2001)
 - Swarthmore College field trip
- Immersive Learning (IL) course design (second half of semester)
 - Focus on how to conduct oral history of the Honors College (1959-present)
 - Workshops on archival research and oral history interviews and transcriptions

Curricular Design and Student Responsibility: Application

- Students responsible for conducting research on each interviewee's life and career
 - Archives, primary and secondary sources, biographies, etc.
- Creating historical timelines for reference during interview
 - Interviewee biography, BSUHC, BSU, national Honors education movement
- Identifying important historical events that took place during interviewee's lifetime



BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
Honors College

Curricular Design and Student Responsibility: Conducting Oral History Interviews

- Conduct long-form (2-hour) digital video interviews of 34 interviewees
 - Three interviews per student

Additional tasks:

- BSU's Digital Corps video-recorded 31 interviews;
 - Students recorded 3 additional interviews
- Students conducted pre-interview contact with three interviewees



BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
Honors College

Origins and Evolution of Honors Curriculum

- September 1922: First American collegiate Honors program is founded at Swarthmore College.
- Swarthmore President Frank Aydelotte was inspired by the Honors degrees of Oxford and Cambridge.
- *Breaking the Academic Lockstep* (1944): "The greatest defect" of education in high schools and colleges is "the regimentation of individuals of different levels of ability into the same program."

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
Honors College

Class Field Trip to Swarthmore College

- Opportunity to discuss Honors pedagogy with prominent Honors educators and students
- Able to compare and contrast the Ball State Honors College with the Swarthmore Honors Program
- Trace change and continuity in collegiate Honors education movement nationally




BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
Honors College




BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
Honors College


What Our Project Accomplished

- Recorded thirty-four 2-hour interviews with BSUHC administrators, staff, faculty, and alumni
- Archived permanently on University Libraries's DMR
 - Videos are streamable
 - Verbatim transcripts accessible
- Facilitated in-depth, cross-generational conversations that co-created a new history of the BSUHC



What Our Project Accomplished

- Produced a 15-minute documentary video presenting the central themes and key events of the BSUHC's 60-year history
- BSU Office of Immersive Learning produced a 6-minute project documentary



Appendix B

Ball State University Honors College Timeline

1955
to
1957
Pre-Honors

-Faculty go to Minnesota conference to learn about honors education and what it may look like at Ball State
-Honors Program proposal at Ball State Teachers College is submitted

1959
to
1965
Starting up

-First Honors classes begin in Sept.
-Jerome Fallon becomes head
-First class of honors students graduate
-Victor Lawhead becomes head
-Honors Student Advisory Council is created

1965
to
1970
New Structure

-Alexander MacGibbon becomes director of program
-A house at 203 N College Ave is designated and used as the Honors house
-Dr. Warren Vander Hill becomes director

1980
to
1987
Honors Living

-HC offices move to the Whittinger Business Building, then Burkhardt
-Botsford-Swinford becomes honors-student-only dorm
-Dr. Vander Hill creates the Undergraduate Fellows program
-Dr. Arno Wittig becomes director and dean

1979
Major Year

The Honors Program becomes the Honors College and thus the first honors college at a public school in the state of Indiana

1974
to
1977
Growing Honors

-Separate honors housing area established in Botsford-Swinford
-Dr. Vander Hill introduces the ID 199 (HONR 199) course
-First Whittinger Scholarships offered
-Honors science classes are offered

1987
to
1989
Expanded Curriculum

-The Whittinger Scholarship covers all tuition, room and board
-HONR 189 Global Studies is added to the curriculum

1996
to
2000
New Leadership

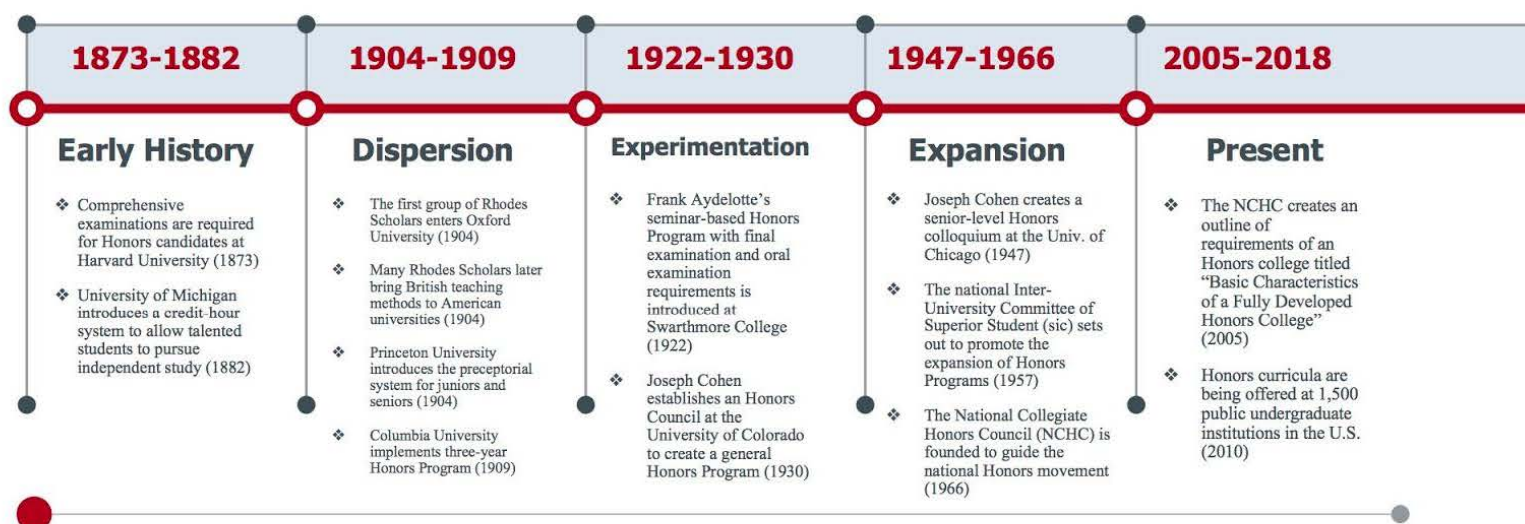
-Dr. Bruce Meyer becomes dean
-Honors College offices are moved to Carmichael Hall
-Dr. Arno Wittig serves as interim dean after Bruce Meyer passed away unexpectedly
-Dr. James Ruebel becomes dean

2000
to
Current
Expansion

-DeHority Complex becomes residence hall for Honors College freshmen
-Edmund F. and Virginia Ball House is renovated and becomes home of the Honors College
-Dr. John Emert becomes dean

Appendix C

National Honors Education Movement in the United States, 1873-2018



Appendix D



18 April 2019

Dear Community Partners, Interviewees, Family, and Friends:--

The student team members of the Ball State University Honors College Oral History Project would like to formally invite you to our public showcase on April 29th for a screening of the short documentary film we produced and to celebrate the completion of this undertaking. The showcase will be held on Monday, April 29th, 2019 from 2:00-4:00 P.M. at the L.A. Pittenger Student Center on Ball State's campus in Room L-28, located in the lower level next to the bowling alley.

This semester, our class conducted in-depth interviews with a select group of former and current Honors College administrators, faculty, and staff, along with notable alumni, in commemoration of the Honors College's 60th anniversary in 2019. These oral histories were videorecorded in the Oral History Workshop studio and will be permanently archived in and accessible online via the University Library's Digital Media Repository later this year. This effort has allowed us to 'make history,' instead of merely studying it! We have created enduring primary source documents about the distinctive experience of the Ball State Honors College spanning six decades through collecting the life stories of thirty key players in the history of the college. Our fifteen-minute documentary film features highlights from the interviews along with observations by the student interviewers. It will be premiered at the showcase to provide attendees with an overview of the Project.

Refreshments will be provided. The showcase will begin with a casual reception, with the documentary to be screened at 2:15 P.M. Afterward, student team members, Project Director Dr. Michael Wm. Doyle, and, we hope, a few of our interviewees, will share brief comments about the experience of participating in this innovative immersive-learning Project.

Metered parking for this event can be found on the ground floor only at the Student Center parking garage (entrance off McKinley Ave.) or on the ground floor of the McKinley parking garage located one block north of the SC (entrance off Ashland Ave.). Visitor parking costs \$1.00 per hour.

We would be honored to have you join us in celebrating the successful completion of this important Project. Direct any questions to Margo Morton of our Events Planning and Promotion team at mjmorton@bsu.edu or at (502) 523-9693.

Sincerely,

The 2019 Ball State University Honors College Oral History Project Team Members:

Emma Cieslik	Melissa Kraman	Erica Smith
Hannah Gunnell	Margo Morton	Ben Wilson
Jocelyn Hall	Noah Nobbe	Prof. Michael Wm. Doyle
Anna Hawk	Elise Schrader	Nathan Rivers, G.A.

**Subject research material, interview topics, and
transcription for Oral History Interview with Professor
Timothy Berg on 28 March 2019, Ball State University,
Muncie, Indiana.**

Pre-Interview Contact Notes: Dr. Timothy Berg

Time of Pre-Interview: 3:10-3:18 P.M., January 16, 2019

Pre-Interviewer: Nathan Rivers

- Dr. Berg was trained as a historian. He received his B.A. in History from the University of Georgia in 1988, then received an M.A. in American Studies and a Ph.D. in History, both from Purdue, the later of which came in 1999. He mentioned that he was briefly at the University of Maryland and at IUPUI, though did not mention specific dates for these.
- He was not involved greatly in any activities in college, but mentioned that he worked as a resident assistant at both Georgia and Maryland.
- After leaving Purdue, Dr. Berg began work at Michigan State, where he taught courses in language composition and writing. He then went to work at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo.
- He started work at Ball State in 2003 in the history department after both he and his wife (who is in the English Department) found positions here. He did state though that he did not immediately quit his job at Western Michigan and continued to work there for 2 years. He noted how lucky he was that both he and his wife managed to find work in the same town.
- After 2 years, a position opened up as a humanities professor in the Honors College, which he applied for and received.
- At roughly the same time, Dr. Berg found that while he still enjoyed history, he no longer liked the process of conducting and reading historical scholarship, and as such decided to move away from this and become an artist. He notes that at this point, the closest he comes to teaching history is his course on the history of ideas in the Honors College.
- In 2013, his position was official moved to the Honors College instead of still being part of the history department.

ASSOCIATE TEACHING PROFESSOR OF HONORS HUMANITIES

Dr. Timothy Berg is an artist and educator. He teaches courses in the humanities, global studies, and colloquia on photography theory and other subjects (Honors 201, 202, 203 189, and 390). In all of his collaborative, discussion-intensive courses he focuses on the history of ideas, working with students to better understand themselves and the broader human condition. He's led a number of domestic and international field studies with students to New York City and to Rome and Florence, Italy. In 2013 he was the director of Worcester Center Study Abroad Program in Worcester, England. In 2014 he was a fellow at the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry which created The Infinite Museum web application for the David Owsley Museum of Art.

Dr. Berg's main interest are in intellectual history, humanities pedagogy, and art. Trained as an historian, he now works primarily as a visual artist devoted to painting and photography. His work can be seen at www.timothydberg.com.

Dr. Berg earned his Ph.D, in history from Purdue University in 1999. He came to Ball State University in 2003 after previously teaching at Michigan State University and Western Michigan University.

The Infinite Museum, Fall 2014

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Academics

SEMINARS AND GRANTS

THE INFINITE MUSEUM

**The Virginia B. Ball Center
for Creative Inquiry**
Kitselman Center, Ball State
University
3401 West University
Muncie, IN 47304

Hours: Monday-Friday 8 a.m.-5
p.m.

Phone: 765-287-0117

Fax: 765-287-0228

[View E-mail Address](#)



Tim and his students sought to re-imagine and challenge the traditional experience of art museum visitors.



The class researched museum practice, education and theory, studied user experience and interactive design, then embarked upon the

arduous process of writing and evaluating over 1,500 prompts and interactive educational experiences to develop their web application, **The Infinite Museum**. The application - a tool both serious and playful, introspective and social - invites visitors to interact with the artwork from new, meaningful and creative perspectives, enabling them to remake their experience, and devise meaning from the art in new and surprising ways.

The class also created a sustainability plan for utilizing the application as an educational resource, and created a promotional video for the app for their community partner, the **David Owsley Museum of Art**.

View The Infinite Museum [Seminar website](#) to learn more about the project.

Explore the web application here: **The Infinite Museum**



Tim Berg,
Assistant
Professor of
Honors
Humanities

L-R, Front Row: Ellie Fawcett, Erin Bretz, Lauren King, Alyson Walbridge, Rachel Podnar, Anna Bowman, Anna Weigand Aidan Feay (on ground); Second Row: Melinda Staup, Amory Orchard, Cooper Cox, Janie Fulling, Elizabeth Curbey, Kayla Gurganus.

Found on “The Odyssey: Just Like You” Facebook page.

<https://www.facebook.com/theodysseyjustlikeyou/photos/a.1905905199630837/1913289095559114/?type=3&theater>

1. What department are you from, and what classes do you teach in the honors college?

I used to be in the History Department, as that's what my Ph.D. is in, American history. But I was on loan from the History Department to the Honors College from 2005 to 2013. In 2013, Dean Ruebel arranged for the Honors College to have three permanent contract faculty lines who would just be in Honors, and I was (and am!) very happy to be one of those three.

2. What drew you to your field?

I got into history as a field because I loved stories about the past, which is what history is at its most basic level. I think I was also drawn to ideas. It was only much later that I began to connect those early interests to a love for ideas and for thinking about what it means to be human. Early on, I cared about stories that talked about what we had done. Now I care more about stories that tell us who we are and what we may become.

3. What do you love about teaching honors courses? Or what has been your most rewarding experience teaching honors classes?

There are so many things I love about teaching honors courses. I tell people that my job involves talking with interesting people about interesting ideas. Can you beat that? There's nowhere else I'd rather be than doing this. I love, too, that even though I may have taught a certain text before, with each new class of students I get to see those texts in new ways and I'm always learning new things. I also never know what's going to come at me from students on a given day. Even two sections of a course, both reading the same text, can produce very different classroom experiences. That keeps me fresh and interested because there's always the possibility that someone will blow my mind with some new idea, and it happens often. On rare occasions I have teared up because some beautiful idea expressed by a student will hit me in such a way that my breath is taken away momentarily. Those are beautiful moments.

4. What is your biggest piece of advice for honors students?

I feel like Honors students come from a culture that puts too much pressure on them to be a certain way. That pressure can be difficult to bear and it can shape you in ways you don't like. It's okay to resist that pressure, and in fact, doing so is a critical process of becoming a mature adult. Embrace that process. Fight for who you are and what you believe in and what you want to be. And, it's okay to be vulnerable, to not know. Embrace uncertainty and ambiguity and learn how to thrive in it. When you do that, when you show your vulnerability, you open up space to grow and invite others to grow with you. Okay, that's more than one piece of advice. Sorry!

TIMELINE

- April 28, 1967
- June 1984-1988: B.A. in U.S. and European History, University of Georgia
- July 1990: Certificate in book and magazine publishing, NYU
- May 1993-1995: M.A. in American Studies, Purdue
- May 1999: Ph.D. in History, Purdue

- 2004-5 Adjunct Instructor of Photography
- 2003-2005 Assistant Professor in Dept of History
- 2005-2013 Assistant Professor, Department of History, assigned full-time to serving The Honors College
- 2013-2018 Assistant Professor of Honors Humanities
- 2018-Present Associate Teaching Professor of Honors Humanities

Topics outline

1. Early life

- a. Parents names, occupations, personalities
- b. Siblings
- c. Interests
- d. City and state: what was it like

2. High school

- a. Where did you go, and what years
- b. What type of student were you? What did you do on a normal weekend?
- c. Activities
- d. Significant teachers

3. College

- a. Why University of GA?
- b. Why US and European history?
 - i. What were classes like
 - ii. Significant professors
- c. Future wife -- Debbie
- d. Activities? RA?
- e. Academic aspirations? Did you know you wanted to be a professor?

4. The first 5 years after college

- a. Certificate in book and magazine publishing, NYU: path to that?
- b. Why New York?
- c. Debbie?

5. Master's degree: American Studies @ Purdue

- a. Why Purdue?
- b. What is / Why American Studies?
- c. Why get a master's?
- d. Debbie got hers @ Purdue University in 1993

6. PhD in history at Purdue

- a. Did you know you would pursue that after your master's?
- b. How long did it take?
- c. Dissertation?
- d. Debbie got hers @ Purdue University in 1998

Topics outline

7. Michigan State University and Western Michigan University

- a. Where were you living?
- b. What did you teach? Language composition and writing at MSU.
- c. How long

8. Ball State in 2003: asst prof of history

- a. Why here? Why switch? How did you find job?
- b. Debbie also got job here
- c. Adjunct Instructor of Photography, 2004-5.

9. Assistant Professor, Department of History, assigned full-time to serving The Honors College, Ball State University 2005-2013.

- a. What interested you in teaching in the Honors College?
- b. What types of classes were you teaching?
- c. Shift from history to humanities
 - i. “I got into history as a field because I loved stories about the past, which is what history is at its most basic level. I think I was also drawn to ideas. It was only much later that I began to connect those early interests to a love for ideas and for thinking about what it means to be human. Early on, I cared about stories that talked about what we had done. Now I care more about stories that tell us who we are and what we may become.”
- d. Dean James Ruebel (2000-2016) & current Dean John Emert
- e. National Collegiate Honors Council Conference presentations

10. Assistant Professor of Honors Humanities, 2013-2018.

- a. No longer part of history dept
- b. 2013: director of Worcester Center Study Abroad Program in Worcester, England.
- c. 2014: The Infinite Museum for the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry.
- d. NYC colloquium
- e. Photography colloquium
- f. Anthony Edmonds and Bruce Geelhoed wrote in their Ball State University: An Interpretive History that “Some faculty opposed Honors at first due to a ‘strong egalitarian impulse’ to not allow an elite group of students to form.”
 - i. Have you ever encountered this attitude? How did you react?

Topics outline

- ii. Think there's any truth to statement; why or why not?
- g. Edmonds and Geelhoed wrote that there have been faculty members who noted it would be a disadvantage to high-achieving students to not have honors. When you teach honors classes, what do you hope to offer that students wouldn't get in other class?
- h. Differences between honors and non-honors students
- i. What do you wish you could change about Honors at BSU?
- j. Relationship with Dr Jason Powell

11. Associate Teaching Professor of Honors Humanities, 2018-.

- a. Different rank. Does it feel different?
- b. Hopes for future

12. Personal life

- a. Wife & Kids
- b. Free time: guitar, travel, photography, art, writing
 - i. How does that help you become better professor?

Archives and Special Collections

University Libraries



Ball State University
Bracken Library, Room 210
Muncie, IN 47304

Phone: 765-285-5078
FAX: 765-285-8149
Email: libarchives@bsu.edu

Ball State University Oral Histories

Archival Identification:

Digital Identification:

Interviewer(s): Margo Morton

Interviewee(s): Professor Timothy Berg

Date of interview: March 28, 2019

Morton: Hello, my name is Margo Morton. Today's date is Thursday, March 28, 2019. I'm interviewing Professor Timothy Berg on the Ball State campus as part of the Ball State University Honors College Oral History Project. Thank you, Professor Berg, for agreeing to participate in this effort which we're conducting during this, the Honors College's 60th anniversary year. I'd like to begin by asking you where and when you were born.

Berg: Thanks for having me. I was born in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in April of 1967.

Morton: Okay, and I know you eventually ended up in Georgia. So, when did your family move there?

Berg: My father got a new job in the fall of 1980. So I moved to Atlanta for my eighth grade year and high school.

Morton: How did you take that move? Were you happy or upset?

Berg: Um, a little bit of both. I didn't know what to expect in Atlanta. I was coming from St. Augustine, Florida, which was the oldest city in the country. And—I didn't know what to expect. I thought it would be interesting and different, so I was excited for a while but less so once I got there.

[1:12]

Berg: But that had little to do with Atlanta itself and more just—I had come from a place in Florida where I had free rein as a child. I could get all over the town, I could go to the beach, I could go all kind of places on my bicycle with friends, and we moved to the suburbs of Atlanta and I lost all of that, and suddenly needed a car to get anywhere, and was too young for a car. So, I went from having a lot of freedom to having not a lot of freedom. So—it took a little bit of a toll. But, it was all right.

Morton: And then, thinking about your parents, can you tell me about them and then any siblings that you grew up with as well?

Berg: You want names, and things like that?

Morton: Yeah, that would be great.

Berg: My father's name was Wally Berg. He was a Navy kid and lived all over the country. But eventually his parents settled in Fort Lauderdale. He worked most of his life as an insurance agent with State Farm, so I remain a little bit loyal to them because they helped pay for my upbringing and college, because they gave him a good job and enabled him to move up in life.

[2:18]

Berg: He got me interested in jazz music, and was just a real low-key but strong sort of father type. He wasn't very demanding or assertive, but he just was kind of a solid rock that was always there, so I could count on him just to be no drama and solid support, so that was nice. My mother is the crazier of the two. He's sort of quiet and—whatever—but she's an artist and ran her own quilt business for a number of years selling patterns and had a quilt store in the Marietta, Georgia area. She's just very artistic so, I think got some of my artistic stuff from her.

[3:01]

Berg: She's the daughter of a man who was the—who ran a Christian college in south Florida and then a business school, so she had a very fundamentalist, Christian upbringing and when she met my lapsed Catholic father, they compromised and raised us sort-of, vaguely as Methodist—I don't know how I slipped into that topic.

I'm the oldest of three boys. I have a brother Ryan who was born in '71 and my youngest, Eric, was born in '74. They work together in the film and television business. They just recently moved back to Atlanta from Hollywood. They work on TV shows. My middle one was a production designer. So, anything you see in the image, in the set, he designs all of that. And then my youngest works for him making it happen. They're an interesting little bunch.

Morton: Thinking about, once you've moved to Georgia and you were kind of feeling it, kind of not, once you got into high school, what was it like there?

[4:10]

Berg: I went from a close group of friends in Florida to a very large, two-thousand-plus-student high school. Most of the people were—I didn't quite understand most of them. I wasn't really—I was a bit of a loner after I got to Atlanta, so that shaped

my high school years. They seemed to be interested in different things than I was interested in, so it kind of shaped me as a person who just didn't enjoy the same things that most of my high school classmates did (laughs). So, a little bit of a weirdo that way, but in a low-key sort of way. I wasn't standing out trying to be strange. It was just—I felt a difference, a separation from what they were into that took me a while to figure out what that was about.

I've forgotten your question (laughs). Yeah, it was—I had a small little group of friends and I kind of was very in my own head, doing my own things. I read a lot of books. Did this, that, and the other. Played a lot of music.

[5:13]

Berg: Worked on my guitar playing. But I was a bit of a loner. But not in a way that felt bad or pressed, that was just kind of the way I liked to be.

Morton: Would you say you were a good student?

Berg: Depends on the subject. I did well on English and the social sciences. My math skills were really terrible, so I did poorly there and any science that required a lot of math—I wasn't able to do—I'm very sort of one-sided in the humanities and not so much the sciences and maths.

Morton: What was the name of your high school and what years did you attend?

Berg: George Walton High School in Marietta, Georgia. I went there from the fall of '81 to the spring of '85.

Morton: Going back real quick, I don't think we caught your mother's name.

Berg: Her name was Alice Drake. But Berg when she got married.

[6:10]

Morton: You graduated high school, and then you went to the University of Georgia.

Berg: That's correct.

Morton: So, why the University of Georgia?

Berg: It was the big state school—it's what I could get into and what we could afford. I had made an effort to try to get into some specialized programs at some schools in the Northeast. I really wanted to get out of the South and get out of Georgia and go somewhere else. But, that didn't work out. So, I ended up going to the University of Georgia. I had a good experience there. I think if I had a do-over again, if I had a choice, I'd go to a small liberal arts college. But, I liked all the

resources and Athens was a great place to be in the eighties. There was a vibrant music scene, which I got to participate in and witness, and that was an exciting time to be there. I was there from '85 until '88.

Morton: How did you participate in the music scene there?

[7:09]

Berg: Athens is a place where, at the time, the rents were really cheap, so a lot of bands could afford to stay there and work cheap jobs, and that was enough money to pay the rent and hold houses with practice spaces. So I—the clubs didn't necessarily enforce the 21-and-over policy, so I could go as a college student. Not because I wanted to drink, but because I wanted to hear the music. I went to clubs all the time and listened to bands, and Athens had a reputation for being a hip music scene, so the acts that would come to Atlanta would sometimes do special gigs in Athens because they wanted to be part of that scene for a little bit. It was also the home of R.E.M. at the time and the B-52s had been there—there's just all these interesting alternative bands that just sort of lit up my brain, which was a good thing.

Morton: Were you playing any music?

Berg: Yeah, I played in a little band for a little while but it wasn't a major thing at the time for me.

[8:08]

Morton: What did you major in?

Berg: I was a history major.

Morton: And why did you pick that?

Berg: I got interested in history as a high school student and I probably liked it before then, but I just had this idea that I wanted to study history and be a history professor after about the tenth grade. Ninth grade, I wanted to be a rock musician—but I realized that probably wasn't the thing I wanted to do for a living. So I got my act together a little bit and decided to do that. I never went through a phase where I was wondering what my major was going to be, or I never switched majors. I came in thinking I was going to do that. I left with that major. It stayed pretty steady that way.

Morton: I'm also interested in some of the extracurricular activities you were involved in. I saw, for example, you were a resident's assistant. Can you tell me more about that?

Berg: That is one of the biggest things I've ever done with my life—one of those big moments where I figured out something new about myself and grew as a person. I made an effort after the first year to get into a private room. I just wanted my own private space and I wasn't the most social person—friendly if spoken to, but not outwardly friendly.

[9:18]

Berg: For some reason, somebody quit on the RA staff and—for some reason—this RA said, "Berg, you should do this." And I thought, Are you nuts? This is ridiculous. Me, of all people? The guy who wanted the single room to get away from people? You're going to want him to be the RA?

And for some reason, I listened to this guy. I wish I could remember his name, because I wish I could thank him. But, I didn't realize at the time what he was doing for me. But something spoke to me that said, Try this. So I did, and I spent the second half of my college time as a resident's assistant. It changed my life. I think having that badge, not of authority over the people, but a badge of permission to speak to people, made a difference. I had a reason to talk to you if I came up to you in the hall and it helped me overcome my shyness about talking to other people because I had a reason to. I'm the RA, it's my job to introduce myself. I'm on the staff, it's my job to talk to you or to help with something that was happening.

[10:15]

Berg: Just a great group of people I worked with, both the students, but also the other RAs. It got me out of my shell and convinced me that I could be—I could grow as a person in interesting ways. I did that and that consumed most of what I did. I wasn't in a lot of clubs, or frankly, any clubs I can think of (laughs). I was still that loner from high school who was interested in his subject and doing his thing and had my little group of friends but—other than that, I was just an RA and that was plenty.

I think I didn't really know how to participate in college. My parents didn't go to college, so they didn't urge me to, "Make sure you're doing this or doing that. Are you joining this, are you looking into study abroad opportunities?" They didn't know any of that stuff. I didn't think to ask those questions or look to do those things. There was no culture of maximizing your college experience. I was taking my classes and pursuing what I liked to do and that was about it.

Morton: Since you mentioned your parents didn't attend college, do you still feel like higher education was really valued in your family?

Berg: Very much so. They tried to go to college. My mother's father didn't support the idea of her going to college because she was female and was already married right

out of—months out of high school she got married to my father. He didn't see a need for this, which was odd since he ran a school and then a college and had a PhD in business. But, he didn't think it was right for his—his eldest daughter to really do that. So he gave her no support financially or otherwise to do this.

My father's folks didn't have a lot of money—and didn't give him much support in any way. So they tried it for a semester and they just couldn't make it happen, so they dropped out. I think they got associate's degrees eventually from my grandfather's college.

So they already—I think they knew because they had tried to go and they knew that they wanted their children to have that because they couldn't have it. It wasn't as if they didn't go and they had no interest in it. They wanted it and couldn't do it, so they made darn sure we were going to go, whether we wanted to or not.

[12:24]

Morton: While you were in your undergraduate education, was this when you met your future wife, Debbie?

Berg: No.

Morton: Okay, when did you meet her?

Berg: I left the University of Georgia in '88 with my degree, and I got it in three years and—by the time—I wanted to go to graduate school, I wanted to be a professor of history at the time, so I hadn't—so when the time came to apply to grad schools, I hadn't had many of my major courses because of the compressed nature of my college career. I had credits and things and got out early.

So I had to take a gap year. I worked in a bookstore and eventually ended up going to the University of Maryland to get an MA in history. I went there for a year and didn't like it at all. I wasn't involved in the history department culture—I had an assistantship with the housing office where I was supervising some things. I was kind of disconnected from the whole academic side of things except for my classes. So I left and I moved to New York and worked in publishing for a couple years, and then I decided I was going to go back to grad school.

[13:32]

Berg: I had no money, I came home to be with my parents for the summer, kind of regroup, get my head together. So I was living with them—I had no job, I had no prospects—when a couple of friends, one of whom I had met in the ninth grade, who was my closest friend—she and her husband, he was working with my future wife, Debbie, and they had these two loose friends. She was home from grad

school at Purdue, I was living at home while unemployed—a real catch (thumbs up). And they just got us together and they just would—get us going out and doing things with them.

So I don't know her from college or any kind of schooling, it was just a random chance that these two friends of mine knew her and they knew me, and put us in the same room together.

Morton: So what year would that have been that you met her?

Berg: Ninety-two [1992].

[14:24]

Morton: So you went to Maryland for a bit, and then—so when you went to New York, why did you choose New York?

Berg: I had always wanted to go to New York. I have an aunt who's about fifteen years older than me, and she and her husband lived in New Jersey and we would go visit her when I was a child, and when I was a young teenager—12, 13, that age—she was still in her twenties when I was that age. So she was my cool aunt who would take me into Greenwich Village as a kid and I just loved the streets, I loved the stores, I loved all the culture, I loved everything about—every little brick, sidewalk. I just ate the place up. She would take me to cafes, and I thought, This is just amazing. I started reading about Greenwich Village and the beat culture and the—just the different art movements that were there and it lit my brain up.

[15:21]

Berg: To go back to suburban Atlanta with these comfortable but very dull suburbs, I just thought, Ah, this is awful. So I had this vision I was going to go to New York and I was going to live in New York.

I was 13 in the eighth grade, all I wanted to be—I wanted to be a cab driver in New York because they get to drive around the city all day and look at the cool buildings. Isn't that awesome? I later learned it's not quite so awesome to drive a cab for thirteen, fourteen hours in the city. But that vision was there. I wanted to go to college there, but my mother said, "Unh-uh. I'm not letting my boy go to New York City." She thought I might turn gay or something, which was a negative for her at the time. She's come around on that.

So when I was sort of deciding that grad school—that Maryland wasn't my thing, I decided to go to New York University's publishing institute in the summer of 1990. I took their summer course and got a job working for Penguin Books. I worked for them for a couple of years off and on.

[16:28]

Berg: Then I decided that maybe it was Maryland that was the problem, not grad school. I still had the dream of wanting to be a history professor so I thought, Well, I probably can't afford to do this in New York, it was so expensive, so I decided I would go back to Maryland for a year.

I started there again and still didn't like it and that—that fall I was living in Maryland and I had met my future wife, she was at Purdue, so I would drive every other weekend—I would take my 1967 banana yellow Dodge Dart and I would drive from D.C. out to West Lafayette—twelve, thirteen hours—with my AM radio in my old car, and I would go see her and then I would spend every minute I could and I would wait until as long as I could before I had to leave and I would drive overnight, Sunday to Monday morning, listening to French hockey games usually (laughs), which I don't understand but, I would hear these games and I would drive back overnight to D.C. After a semester of that I said, "Enough." So I transferred to Purdue and that was the end of that.

[17:30]

Morton: And what is Debbie's full name?

Berg: Her name is Deborah Mix, M-i-x.

Morton: So part of your reason for transferring to Purdue was to close that gap.

Berg: Yes.

Morton: So you studied American Studies while you were there. Was that just to further your dreams of becoming that history professor?

Berg: Yeah. I wanted to study American history, and they have what I thought was an interesting American Studies program. I thought, I'll try that. That will be interesting. Because I was interested in music and culture and those sorts of things.

I thought, Okay, that seemed a better fit. They had a professor there who I thought was really interesting, Susan Curtis, who I wanted to work with a little bit, and others as well. I thought, Okay, I'll try that. So my MA's in that but then I switched to a straight history PhD program there as well.

[18:27]

Morton: Were there any other notable professors you had at Purdue during either your master's degree or doctorate degree?

Berg: I was probably closest to Michael Morrison, who was an Early Republic and 19th century political historian. Not so much because of what he studied, but because of who he was as a person. He was a little firebrand of a man, and I got to be a teaching assistant for him and he would do these big, 300-seat lecture hall courses. He would walk on the desks, which kept people paying attention because he could fall on you. He would get very visibly upset when he was lecturing about slavery or the Vietnam War or something terrible. Throwing the podium down—he smashed it one day. None of it was an act. He was getting himself riled up because he truly cared about these issues and I thought, Okay, that kind of passion in the classroom, that's something I wanted to be close to. And he was just very good as a mentor and just a very loving person to kind of pull us up and help the grad students out.

Susan Curtis, who I mentioned, was fantastic. Jon Teaforde was my thesis—my PhD advisor. He was an urban historian, known for a lot of different books on urban government and so forth. Lots of people. Those are the three big ones.

[19:47]

Morton: What years were you pursuing your master's degree?

Berg: From '93 to '95. And then I got my PhD in '99.

Morton: I saw Debbie got her PhD from Purdue in 1998, and what did she get that in?

Berg: In English. She's an American literature and poetics scholar.

Morton: Did she want to be a professor as well?

Berg: Um-hm. Yep.

Morton: So after you got your master's degree, what happened then?

Berg: I slipped right into the PhD program. I wasn't interested in—in leaving that area because she was still working on her degree and I didn't want to separate and go somewhere else. And I liked where I was. So I stayed there. She finished in '98 and got a job at Michigan State so I followed her. I was in the dissertation phase at that point, so my classwork was done and I could go with her and—while she worked at Michigan State, I finished my dissertation and did some substitute teaching and that kind of thing, just until I finished my degree.

[20:58]

Morton: Were you surprised that you liked the area—since having moved from the South to the Midwest? Did you find any differences in living in those places?

Berg: Yeah, I wasn't excited about it. I hadn't heard of Purdue when I met her, and now I have two degrees from that place. It was good for me and I have a lot of fond memories of being there, but it took me a while to adjust because, as I said earlier, I'm a big city person. I love New York, I love all those things, and West Lafayette, for all of its charms, is not New York City. The Midwest is smaller. As a Florida boy, it took me a while to get used to the winters up here. Not so much the cold, but the lack of sunlight.

[21:33]

[Pause in recording]

Berg: So I taught at Michigan State University for a couple of years and in their American Thought and Language program, which is how Michigan State does their composition teaching. I taught courses on American thought, American radical thought, environmental thought, a range of different ways—they're sort of thematic ways to teach composition. So I did that for a couple of years. And then my wife got a job at Kalamazoo College down the road, so we left to go there, and I walked into the history department at Western Michigan, and there was a brand-new chair of the department, and I explained my situation. He happened to have an opening, he happened to have just finished a nine-year academic separation from his wife—they had to live in separate cities to have their careers—so he was sympathetic to me not wanting to have to leave town or go work somewhere else, so all other things being equal, I got a job there. I worked there for two years—wait, no—three years. Two years in person and then a year after I moved here I worked there too.

[22:36]

Morton: So you started working at Ball State in 2003, but then you were also still working at Western Michigan?

Berg: For a year, yeah.

Morton: So were you driving back and forth?

Berg: I was. My wife got a tenure-track job in English at Ball State, where she still is. She's a full professor now. And what I was offered was—I had an offer for a part-time position from the history department chair. But in between the time he had written that email to me—or letter—he had since gone on to another job, so I had an email about an offer from a chair who had since gone. And I thought, That doesn't sound too secure, so I'm going to hedge my bets here. I kept my Western Michigan job, which was a Tuesday/Thursday schedule. Ball State gave me a Monday/Wednesday/Friday. So I would go up to Kalamazoo and back in the same day. I would—go up to Kalamazoo, three hours, teach a couple of classes, have some office hours, three hours back.

[23:30]

Morton: How long did you do that for?

Berg: For an academic year. Paid off all my student debt, so it was a good thing.

Morton: I also saw for one year—your second year here—you were an adjunct instructor of photography?

Berg: Yeah. I had realized when I was working on my dissertation in the late '90s that I didn't really want to be a historian. I just didn't really enjoy the end product of scholarship and I didn't really enjoy making it either. Which was a bit of a, not quite mid-life, but—I don't know—quarter-life, whatever, third-life crisis of some kind. Like, What have I done with my time? I've got a degree in this thing, or I'm about to have one. Do I want to quit and do something else? No, I'll finish, I came this far, I'll finish the degree. I'm glad I did or I wouldn't be sitting here. But, I realized that I just didn't want to do this anymore.

[24:30]

Berg: I developed an interest in photography and just taught myself, and had a few moments with that where I realized, (gasps) Okay, there's something about the expressiveness of making art that spoke to me in a way that scholarship never did in history. I still cared about history, still cared about memory and the past and so forth, but I didn't want to express it through articles and books like I was trained to do.

And I think I knew that for a number of years, but didn't quite want to recognize it because this is my identity: I'm going to be an historian, and I wanted to do this since I was in the tenth grade. And to switch on that in the late twenties was not a comforting thought. In between that realization and 2004—whenever I did this adjunct job—I had learned to do photography pretty well, so I had met one of the professors here and she said, "We have a need for someone to teach a beginner's class. Would you do it?" I said, "Yes". So I did that for a year.

[25:29]

Morton: By 2005, you were assigned to teach full-time in the Honors College, but you were still a part of the Department of History.

Berg: Yeah, my history position became full-time, contract position and then in the fall of 2005 the Honors College had a—the history professor that they had loaned to Honors to teach over there resigned, had taken another job, so they needed someone to fill in. So I did that for a semester, and liked it. The job came open—they were going to do a national search for this, and—you know, I mentioned

earlier that RA who kind of took me aside and said, “I think you should do this.” That was one of the first big things—big pivots. Second was this job because I didn’t think I wanted to apply for the job I have now, because I thought, I’m a post-1940—I’m trained in post-1945 U.S. history. What do I know about the ancient Greeks and the Romans and the Honors curriculum? I don’t know anything about that stuff. I shouldn’t admit that to you.

[26:29]

Berg: But I had to learn this and I thought, This is not the job for me. But a senior member of the department here, Tony Edmonds, who—I’ve thanked him personally, maybe one day he’ll see this—thank you Tony—he came to me and he said, “I think you should do this. I think you’d be good at this job. I think it would suit you. You’re a good fit for it. Why don’t you apply?”

And I said, “Tony, I might as well teach physics. I just don’t...”—and he said, “No, no, no. Do it. Do it. Do it.” So it was one of those occasions where somebody knew better than I did what was best for me, and I owe him a huge, huge debt because he saw something in me that turned out to be accurate and I listened to him and—changed my life. After the fall of 2005, I was on loan to the history department for—from history to Honors—and I stayed that way until 2013. We got our own lines and I moved over the full-time, permanently.

[27:29]

Morton: When you first started teaching in the Honors College, what was it about teaching Honors that you really enjoyed?

Berg: I think I had come to see the limitations of lecture-type classes. I think I understood the excitement of discovery through the art-making I’d been doing, and these classes really stretched me, because I didn’t have a background in this content, so I had to learn everything. And what I already knew how to do was how to connect with students and how to ask questions, so having some basic skills in that really helped me develop that even further.

[28:10]

Berg: The new material stretched me in new ways. I liked the—the sort of, the barn-raising sort-of atmosphere: we’re working on something together, we’re trying to figure something out. I’d always been interested in philosophy and other kinds of things, and literature—I almost got a second major in that in college—but, for whatever reason, did not. I like the mixture of things and when I realized in the late ‘90s getting my graduate degree that I wasn’t what I call a “post-hole-digger scholar,” meaning somebody that stays with one topic for his or her entire career, just sort of digs deep on it—that wasn’t my personality. I respect those people, I think that’s great that they do that, but it wasn’t for me. I’m a big picture person. I

like to have my interests in a lot of different things, and I don't necessarily want to be—go to the depth that a scholar of a certain area would, so the Honors job lets me think about Greek philosophy and British literature and Roman architecture and Renaissance art and all kinds of things that—is exciting to me.

[29:16]

Berg: I don't feel like I've learned what I can learn from this and I'm done. It's always something new and I think that excitement just—was pretty visceral and pretty quick. I have not lost that feeling since.

Morton: We read in Tony Edmonds and Bruce Geelhoed's book, *Ball State University: An Interpretive History*, they wrote that there were faculty members who have noted in the past how it would be a disadvantage to higher-achieving students to not have their Honors classes. When you are teaching these Honors classes, what do you hope you're offering students that they wouldn't get in a non-Honors class?

Berg: I could not really have answered that question when I started this job, but I have a clearer sense of it now, fourteen years in. I think what we're doing—the content matters, but it's not about the content. The content is a vehicle to something bigger than that. That's what I have learned.

[30:19]

Berg: My classes are kind of like a group therapy session. Not because individual students and I have problems—which we do, of course—but, we don't address those exactly, but we deal with the big human problems that we all face: how should we live? Where's meaning in life? What has meaning? How should we live with others? What should we do with our time? What is the nature of reality? What is the nature of the self? All these things.

And we grapple with questions that I think are really about living our best lives. The Honors curriculum allows me to adapt all different kinds of texts and ideas and bring things together from multiple disciplines. Nobody in there's a major in that stuff, so they're bringing their different disciplines to the classroom, so it's always different every semester.

The content needs to be difficult, it needs to be challenging in various ways—so it can't just be anything in there—but it really is just a vehicle to grapple with important life questions.

[31:19]

Berg: So I see myself more as a counselor, the guide on the side rather than the sage on the stage kind of person, and that suits me really well. And I think that's a key thing that honors pedagogy does, it's really about helping build the whole person

so when those people go back to their major programs, they're bringing ideas and attitudes, maybe, and practices that wouldn't have necessarily been there in their majors. There's a lot of crossover for sure, but we are more intentional about the kind of question-asking that we do, and I think that's what really—is what we're about. We ask questions and we keep pushing and I think we try to delight in the question-asking and the answering that we do.

[32:05]

Morton: So it's pretty clear that you're interested in honors pedagogy and teaching honors. That's also clear—you've spoken a few times at the National Collegiate Honors Council conferences on different topics. So what has interested you in talking about these topics, like, "Aesthetic Experiments as Ways of Knowing" or "The Humanities Experience"?

Berg: I feel like I'm at a stage in my career where I have a sense of what we're doing and why, and my working methods are a little bit unusual, maybe, to some of the people that I'm aware of, so it felt like the right time to share some of those things. I'm constantly looking for new ways to approach these ideas and to move away from just thinking about them to experiencing them. I have a long way to go still, but as I develop ideas that help me engage those questions in new ways, it seemed like the right time to start sharing them.

I do care about this, I do care about bringing different perspectives to my students, so it seemed like a natural extension to share that with my colleagues, but it took a few years of developing the confidence and feeling like I had something worth sharing—enough experience to have something worth sharing.

[33:20]

Morton: Now shifting to thinking about different professional relationships you've had within the Honors College—so when you first started there, Dean James Ruebel was in charge—he was there until 2016 before he passed away. I was wondering what your relationship was with him.

Berg: I really liked working with Jim. He's—he was 20 years my senior, give or take, and—so a bit of an academic father figure to kind of guide us through this. He had a very hands-off sort of approach, which I thrived under. I always felt like he trusted me to do my best and that I was doing good work, and he didn't believe in micromanaging each of us. I felt empowered to try oddball things. I knew that if I was going to have the students on the back patio of the Honors House banging pots and pans together for—to do something with a Greek play, he was not going to bat an eye about that.

[34:22]

Berg: In fact, he was going to support that kind of craziness. He was just a good person for advice, very encouraging. I got to travel with him to Italy two times and he was a Roman classicist, so to stand in the Roman forum with him and see that place through his eyes was a pretty amazing experience, because he knows things about that that I'll never know. That was something. He was—he was quite something to work with.

Morton: Can you tell me more about those Italy trips? Were those part of an Honors class?

Berg: Yeah, he had been doing this for a number of years with different faculty, where he would take students to Rome and Florence to see some of the great classic sights of Rome and Renaissance Florence. I was privileged to be invited to come along with that. He would bring the Whiting Scholars. He would teach that class with another faculty member over the course of a year. We did a colloquium on Italy just to help students get ready.

[35:22]

Berg: I was privileged to go along. I was kind of his logistics person. I think he wanted a younger faculty member who could get up in the middle of the night if there was a student emergency and go to the ER, instead of him. Which is fine—I had to earn my keep somehow—so I did those kinds of things and learned from him just how he conducted the class and how he conducted the field studies. That was my first time doing that, was with him.

Morton: I'm also interested more in when you said, he empowered you to try "oddball" things—were there any other examples you've had of that? Of some "oddball" things you've done?

Berg: How much time do we have? (laughs) I think my art interests got me interested in feeling ideas in addition to thinking them, and I wanted to get more experiential in my classes. I've tried a number of things over the years to try to break out of the very good work of sitting in a circle and discussing, which I still think is a classic and good pedagogical thing that I do most of the time.

[36:24]

Berg: But I've tried a number of different experiments. For a class in New York City—I took a class to New York City a number of years ago and they—I was interested in the "Aesthetics of Place," is what it was called, so I had the students work on aesthetic experiments when the idea was, how can you—how do you see the world? How do you move through the world? What is it that's unique about your approach to feeling beauty in the world? And once you've figured out what that is, how can you design an experiment where other people could follow these steps and try it out? At least get a glimpse of what your—what you feel.

And the students were doing the weirdest things. This one woman talked about walking around and she would draw in her mind's eye with a black marker around the outlines of buildings and trees as she walked. And I thought, That's just bizarre, but beautiful and great. Another one was interested in dance, so she wanted to help us understand what it was like to push against air, and I never thought about dancing as pushing back against force. I thought it was like free, and you're just moving, she says, "Oh no, you're pushing. You're pushing and being pulled."

[37:35]

Berg: Once they designed these things, we had to go try them out. The dancer took us to the top of the parking garage next to the Honors House and taught us to do some dance on the top of the garage, and we were pushing with each other and doing partner sort of things. And I got a glimpse—I'm not a dancing person generally, so that got me a sense of what she was feeling and how she was thinking about things.

In another example apart from that assignment, in my Honors 201 class, when we read Greek drama, I wanted to get some sense of this concept of the Dionysian and the Apollonian concept that [Friedrich] Nietzsche talks about. We read that. So we wanted to balance the formality, the pure vision of the Apollonian with the chaos that Dionysus is. So I had some people in the middle of the patio read and try to do it as best they could from the play—act the play out.

[38:32]

Berg: Meanwhile, the rest of the class had pots and pans that I took out of the Honors College kitchen, and they were banging on the pots and pans creating chaos and gradually the circle—we were chanting, banging—and the circle would eventually sort of close in on the actors and they had to respond to that. We were trying to feel a balance between the Apollonian purity and the Dionysian chaos. That got a raised eyebrow from the dean, but in an approving sort of light. By that point, he's like, "All right, Berg's doing his thing. There must be a reason for it so I'm not going to worry about it." Which was good.

I've had people in Christy Woods writing poetry. A New York class I did last year, we did "cruises" where we had to design a way to approach the city. They were all unique and different. That's just a few of the things I've tried, but I keep at it.

[39:32]

Morton: Do you find that overall, the Honors students are willing to go along with these ideas?

Berg: Yes. Yeah, they are.

Morton: Do you ever face opposition from any of them?

Berg: Not overtly. Not outright. I sometimes hear about things in writing later, where somebody will say, “I’m not sure I want to try this Buddhist thing because it might interfere with my Christian religious beliefs.” And I think, Well, okay. But it’s not meant to be pushing against someone’s religion. It’s meant to try something else out. On occasion, I’ll read about that, but it’s rarely ever put in my face or rarely ever does anybody raise a concern about it. So yeah, not really.

[40:20]

Morton: And after James Ruebel, there was our current dean, John Emert. I was wondering your relationship with him.

Berg: I got to know John when he was the associate dean under Jim for a good number of years actually. He started as associate dean, I want to say the year after I—no, maybe 2008. I had been there for several years when John came on. He and Jim were a good team, and I got the same kind of support from John, the same kind of respect from John that I got from Jim, so that was good.

I was also getting more confident in what I was doing too, and John will tell you straight to your face what he thinks about something, but it’s always in a polite and good manner. He shoots from the hip, as he likes to say. I appreciate that. We have a good working relationship. He respects what I do, I respect what he does and he gives me the same kind of freedom that Jim did to be my best professional self without micromanaging me, and I like that. But he’s there as a resource too, so that’s also good.

[41:24]

Morton: Another relationship I had to ask about was your office mate, Professor Jason Powell. I know of you two as the “buddies” of the Honors College.

Berg: Um-hm. We’re close.

Morton: I was wondering how that friendship started.

Berg: I was the chair of the search committee that hired him. I just had a feeling about this guy on the telephone. We didn’t do site visit interviews for this position, so we hired him sight unseen, just via a phone interview—I think—maybe he came to campus, I can’t remember. Well anyway, I just had a feeling about this person, that he was the right sort of attitude for Honors. He seemed a little bit irreverent, a little bit crazy in a good way, and he seemed to have a good understanding of what we were trying to do, that it wasn’t a lecture-type environment, it wasn’t a

put-content-over-to-students environment, it was a create-an-experience environment. And I thought, This guy can do something interesting.

[42:29]

Berg: I'm very proud of that achievement (laughs) in hiring him, because he's probably one of the best professional decisions I've made, is to hire him in the Honors College, be part of that hiring process.

He and I share an office. I liken us to being a version of *The Odd Couple*, if you know that analogy from the Neil Simon play or the TV show that was on. Felix and Oscar are these male roommates who are divorced and they share an apartment, and Felix is the shirt-tucked-in, a little more uptight, a little more "small-C conservative" personality. Oscar is a sports writer who never tucks his shirt in, is loud, and a bit obnoxious at times, a bit of a bear of a man. You can probably figure out which one of those two I am. I'm the Felix of the two. My shirt's usually tucked in, I don't swear as much at students, I don't hug them, those kind of things (laughs). I'm a little more reserved that way.

[43:27]

Berg: We make a nice sort of complement. We've become really close friends. He's one of my two or three closest friends in the world. So I'm very lucky.

As we talk about expanding the Honors College House—not that they're going to give me a private office, but even if they did, I would say no, because I like being in the office with him.

Morton: You've also taught classes together, like the New York colloquium.

Berg: One time.

Morton: How do you think you were able to play off of each other in that class?

Berg: I think it worked okay. You could probably tell me something about that. It worked okay I think. Sometimes having two cooks in the kitchen is a little much, but we coordinated things all right. The only drawback was that neither of us was really our full-on, true teaching self. We were different. Just having the different—having the other person in the room altered the chemistry in a different way. Not worse, but just different.

[44:30]

Berg: I enjoyed working with him, but it was different to have somebody else. I had to think in terms of, what's he going to be doing with his group? How does this relate to what I'm doing? Normally I work alone, so it's only just whatever

happens in my head, and I can call an audible five minutes before class starts and just change things up and do something, and I sometimes do. But I can't when there's a partner. But, I would still do it again in a second. He was great to work with.

Morton: Moving along to—by 2013, you were completely part of the Honors College, no longer in the history department. You've done a lot of different things since then. For example, in 2013, you directed a study abroad program in England. Can you tell me more about how that came to be?

Berg: We used to have a program of centers that had been started at various times. There was a London center, there was a—other places I forget.

[45:29]

Berg: There was a Worcester, England center. It was a partnership with the University of Worcester, about two hours west of London. Students could go take classes there from English faculty and also one from the Ball State faculty member going. I applied to go do that and was accepted and was thrilled about that.

So I moved my wife and kids to England for the summer—for six weeks, part of the summer—for six weeks. The students took classes, I took them on various excursions. We went to Scotland together, bunch of places. Went to London for a few nights and stayed there. It was a project that was set up in part by the English faculty, but also there was a lot of room for me to develop things I wanted to do with them. I would have done that again, but they have since closed the programs for various financial reasons, I think. It was a great experience. I'd do it again.

[46:24]

Morton: Did that include non-Honors students as well?

Berg: It did. It was open to the university. I just happened to be the person chosen. It wasn't an honors thing exactly.

Morton: In 2014, I was also interested in your Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry project, which was The Infinite Museum. Can you tell me more about what The Infinite Museum was?

Berg: The first director of the Virginia Ball Center, Joe Trimmer, had been on me for years to develop an idea. It took a few years to incubate. But, I wanted to do something to change how people experience art in the museum setting. I wanted to get away from the usual approach of, we look at the art in its cultural context, and we think about it chronologically and historically. Those are all important things—I'm not dismissing them, it's a good thing. But I wanted to introduce an element of play into art appreciation.

[47:20]

Berg: So I had this idea for something I wanted to call The Infinite Museum, and I wanted to alter how patrons of the arts could experience the art museum. That was the end of my idea. I had nothing more in particular that I understood what to do.

I was lucky enough to be given this grant. I went to the Virginia Ball Center, at this beautiful mansion—the Kitselman Center, west of campus. I recruited a bunch of students throughout the spring of 2013—no, spring of 2014. In the fall of '14, we all went over there and they took no other classes. I taught no other classes. We just focused on this project. The very first day of the seminar, I said, “Okay, this is the general idea. How are we going to make it happen?”

Really, it was a beautiful extension of what we do in the Honors classrooms all the time, because I don’t come into my Honors classrooms and say, “Okay, I’m going to present you with this content, you’re going to listen to me talk at you and you’re going to take notes and give it back to me on an exam.”

We’re going to figure these things out together. We’re going to build something together.

[48:24]

Berg: Like the Amish barn-raising metaphor I like to use, we all come with different talents and skills and different ideas about how to build this thing. The Virginia Ball course was just a more pure extension of that, where we had all day, five days a week, to focus on this project. It was an academically life-changing event for me, because not only was it an extension of what I do in the Honors classroom on a regular semester basis, but the intensity of it—having a project that we had to do, a product we had to make, a partner—we were partnered with the David Owsley Museum of Art—we couldn’t just make this an academic exercise that I graded for a grade, it had to be—it had to work. It had to be something that was actually good.

It couldn’t just fail because it was just an exercise. It was a full-on product we were trying to make. I knew things were working when there was a day—maybe three weeks in—where I had a meeting on campus unrelated to The Infinite Museum project. I said to the students, “You show up on time as usual. Get started. You know what you’re doing, whatever you have to do right now. I will come in when I’m done.”

[49:36]

Berg: And I walked in from my meeting back into the room where they were all

working, and they said, “All right Berg, we have some homework for you. We need you to do this, this, this, and this.” They rattled off a bunch of things that were my responsibilities to do. And I said—I was mock upset—I was like, “Wait a second, you don’t get to tell me what to do. I tell you what to do.”

But, secretly, I was so thrilled and I immediately made it that I was kidding around with you. This is great. This tells me that you have bought in—you’ve taken ownership of the course. You’ve taken ownership of your learning, you’ve taken over the project, and I will be in the role that I really want to be in, which is as CEO: Chief Encouragement Officer. I’m there to troubleshoot, to give encouragement, to make—on occasion I had to make some executive decisions, but that was pretty rare. They ran with it. I had super bright people, all of them fascinating and interesting.

[50:26]

Berg: I was a little bit wrecked coming out of that, to go back to a regular classroom, because—wait a minute, we’ve only got fifty minutes, three times a week, to work with these people? That just felt so little time. It took a bit of an adjustment, but we ended up making this product that is a cell phone and tablet—web application that gives you a bunch of different prompts where you can go into the museum and hit “random,” and it will give you a random prompt. It takes you to a work of art or to a room or just the entire museum and it asks you to do something.

So, when I’m standing in front of a Maori war club in the South Asian/South Pacific Islander art, it will say something like, “Pretend you’re a Maori warrior. Drop and give me twenty push-ups.” I’m like, okay. I’m doing push-ups in the museum in front of these war clubs and when I got up, I felt different about what I was looking at. It changed my relationship to that art.

[51:22]

Berg: I had a moment where somebody—one of the prompts said, “Find the first work of art you see after reading this prompt, whatever gallery you’re in, and imagine that is the last work of art that’s surviving of the human race.” One of the students wrote that. I thought, I found this landscape from the late nineteenth century, happened to be the first thing my eyes landed on, and it was like a waterfall or something, and I thought, Oh no. There’s no evidence of us. There’s no people in this picture. We didn’t matter at all.

I went from that emotion to, wait a second. This is a painting. The art survived. We had this relationship with the environment. It was great. One of those great highs, and lows.

I won’t go into too many of these. A third one said, “Look at the cracks in the

Renaissance paintings—it's called crackle, is the art term, because the varnish cracks over time—and think about the fragility of all things." I thought, Man, that's deep. Some of these were really deep and philosophical. Some were playful.

[52:24]

Berg: One of them asked people to think about the museum as—filled with hot lava, and you had to move from artwork to artwork to not drown in the lava. I thought, All right, that's bizarre.

It was really these playful, different ways of engaging with the art and that changed the relationship. It was meant to be a social thing, so you'd go with your friends, if you had friends with you, and you would talk about your responses to the art.

I'm very proud of that. That's one of my favorite achievements in my academic career, is to help nurse that along and make that happen.

Morton: How do you think that experience has affected your teaching now?

Berg: I think it is—it's not always apparent on a week-to-week look at my classes, but it has pushed me to keep thinking about experiential types of learning and to think about oddball ways of looking at material and rather than just pushing them from a straight-out perspective. It's continued to resonate all these years later. I'm still in touch with a number of people from the seminar.

[53:26]

Berg: It's still working on me in different ways. And I think it's an extension of me as a person, as an artist. I didn't quite realize how much so at the time, but given what has happened to me since, as an artist, that really has—I can see where that fit into my growth and development, as both a teacher and an artist. Helping people find their relationship to the great beauty of the world. And that project was just one way to do that. My classes are another way to do that. It's all coming together nicely.

Morton: Another class you have is your photography colloquium, so can you tell me about that? I also want to know how many times have you hosted that class at this point?

Berg: I can't answer that question—I don't—I think I started this in '09 maybe. I'd have to look at my vita [curriculum vitae] and see. Probably ten times, maybe. Something like that. Maybe not quite that many times.

[54:21]

Berg: That class is part—when I was saying earlier that Jim Ruebel gave me a lot of freedom to teach different classes, he meant that. I don't have a degree in art. I'm self-taught. When I approached him about doing a colloquium on photography, he said, "Sure." He'd seen that I had done the thing in the art department, he knew I was doing this. So he said, "Fine, give it a try."

When I wanted to do a class on running, he said—or, barefoot running, to be more precise—he said, "Sure, go ahead, try it, see what happens." This is an—the class is a class in photography theory. It's not a how-to or a history of. It's more of a "what is this strange world that the photograph makes? What kind of world is it? How do we think about life through the still image of the photograph?"

There's some weird stuff going on in photography, in the nature of photography, that that class grapples with. It's one of my—it's probably my favorite class to teach because it aligns most closely with my creative interests in art, but it also has something in common with my other classes, which we deal with very strange, important ideas.

[55:33]

Berg: I like that I never get tired of them, and the students always bring something new every semester. Even though I'm reading the same book, maybe, it's always new because somebody's got something different to say about it. I love doing that course.

Morton: Can you tell me more about your artistic endeavors outside of the classroom?

Berg: Sure. I've been evolving as a person. That realization during my PhD writing phase—that I wasn't wanting to be an historian like I thought I did when I was in the tenth grade up through near the end of grad school—was a bit of a life crisis, because I had tied my identity to being an historian. That's what I'm going to be, I'm going to be a professor. That's so integral to who I am as a person. That was a real break—that was a bit of a crisis for a while. I wasn't quite sure what I was going to be doing with myself after that point.

[56:27]

Berg: But, I had made a couple of photographs that had convinced me that there's something there. There's some way of working that was useful to me. Over time, that's just developed. My sense of how to do that has changed than what it was. It's a little more abstract, a little looser, it's a little more playful. That evolved in the last couple of years into an interest in painting. Now I really identify as a painter than a photographer, although I still do both of those things.

What I think is happening is that I'm—I'm letting go of the real and moving into

the abstract. I used to care about facts very much—what happened and why. That’s the historian in me. Now I’m moving away from—I went through a period of very sharp, Ansel Adams type of photography—I’ve been working on finding my proper vocabulary. My vocabulary’s getting more and more abstract.

[57:35]

Berg: Something is speaking to me about that kind of work. The painting I’m doing now is—it’s discovery every day. I don’t understand why I’m moved by line and shape. But, I also don’t understand why music moves me, really. I like not knowing, and I like that engagement. I think what I’m trying to do is figure out my relationship to the universe, like we all are. And for me, it’s going to be through visual art, and it is through visual art. I’m just—I just love this process of having that engagement.

I was talking to this painter over in the art department named Hannah Barnes not too long ago about her work and my work, and she said, “Well, really it’s like a conversation with yourself.” And I thought, But also with the universe. With Way, as the Daoists would call it. I like that conversation.

[58:29]

Berg: I think as this abstraction keeps going, one day I’m just going to keep abstracting myself into a little point of light, and when I’m dead, just like “boop” (raises hands), there it is, gone. That’s a little freaky and weird. But, in the meantime, I like this process of engagement.

Morton: And I saw too—you’ve taken part in a lot of different workshops with different artists or poets, like Lynda Barry, or Diane Seuss—you also helped bring Teju Cole to campus. What do you really see as the benefit of doing this ongoing education of yourself?

Berg: It’s exposure to new ideas. It’s exposure to new ways of working. It’s exposure to new forms. I think form can go a long way to determining content in art and in life. Finding one’s proper form, finding one’s vocabulary, gives you a way of working and being in the world that matters—that works for people.

[59:25]

Berg: When I discovered Lynda Barry’s work, I knew her stuff in the eighties, I knew her cartoons, and I enjoyed them, but they didn’t hit me the way they—that her later work did, where she was talking about working with images and working with memory and the past. I felt my historian interests and my art interests coming together in her work, and I had an opportunity to apply to get some university money to bring a speaker to campus. I think we competed with other colleges, and that proposal won. I was thrilled because I’m like, “All right, I’m in

charge of this.” The dean said, “You just take this—you just do this.” I got to go get her at the airport and drive her to and from, and those conversations in the car, just the two of us, I will never forget. She’s just nuts in the best possible way. I wanted to have exposure to those people, and I wanted to help other people on campus be exposed to these interesting ways of working.

[1:00:25]

Berg: When Di Seuss taught different poetry forms—those poetry forms brought things out of me I didn’t know were in me. The form did that.

Teju Cole’s forms were also animating me and exciting me. I thought, Okay, I’m not a scholar, I’m not going to be writing books and articles—that’s not my contribution. My contribution is in the classroom. But, I’ve started to extend the notion of what the classroom is to be bringing in speakers to campus, to presenting at conferences about teaching. It’s an extension of sharing the forms that excite me with others.

Those three artists—and I hope there are many more to come if I can get the money to do it—are ways of exposing people, including me, to these other ways of working.

Morton: How do you think your art and meeting with those people—how do you think that has helped you become a better honors professor?

Berg: I think it’s helped me understand that the forms that we work with matter. I want to keep finding different forms to help students find what works for them, to feel and see and think and know in different ways.

[1:01:34]

Berg: When I came across this poem a couple of years ago by Mary Oliver—who I’m just madly in love with her work—I was so sad when she died this January—she has this poem called “Sometimes.” And in the middle of that poem, out of nowhere, she stops and she writes, “Instructions for living a life: Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it.” Seven short words. They’re like the notes that the blues uses. You can just reorient those and rearrange them in multiple ways. You’re always going to get something beautiful and interesting.

And I thought, That’s it. That was the epiphany that brought my artistic interests, my teaching interests, my interests in the history of ideas—all these things came together, and I thought, That’s exactly what I’m trying to do. I’m trying to help myself and the people I come into contact with—my students, my children, everybody that I know—I want to help them learn and help myself learn how to pay more close attention to the world, because the idea is, when you pay close attention, you cannot help but be moved by the beauty and be astonished by the

beauty of the world. Even the terrible things—you can't help but be astonished.

[1:02:47]

Berg: That third part, the tell about it—we have to find the different means of telling about our astonishment. The different forms. For some people, it's art. For some people, it's history writing. For some people, it's music. Whatever—all these myriad ways we tell about it. I'm still in the beginning processes of making that my curriculum, I think. That realization from Mary Oliver was huge, because it's bringing my personal, artistic life and my professional life as a teacher in honors together. I'm bringing in the excitement that I feel trying different forms, and I want to translate that and make those opportunities happen for honors students.

Luckily, I'm in a position where I don't have to work with a set curriculum or work in certain ways that are prescribed to me. I'm given great freedom as long as I stay within the general chronological time periods of that matter, or the general content—if it's about photography, it better be mostly about photography. I have a lot of freedom to try different forms and help people find their proper vocabulary, or expand that vocabulary. That is how those two sides have come together.

[1:03:58]

Berg: I've realized I've forgotten your initial question in that answer, but I think maybe the answer's in there, I don't know. You can tell me.

Morton: Yeah, that was good. That was helpful. It sounds like you've gotten a lot out of teaching Honors, and you do have a lot of freedom in your classes to do what you want to explore. I was wondering what, if anything, do you wish you could change about Honors at Ball State?

Berg: With me, or the program?

Morton: Maybe you can start with you, and then go to the program?

[1:04:31]

Berg: The downside of my approach—to having an interest in lots of things—is that I don't become a content expert in anything. Sometimes I feel that a little bit. To be a contract faculty member here is to be always at a lesser level than the tenure-track faculty. I never get told that by people in Honors, but sometimes I get told that by people outside of Honors.

There is a cost to not pursuing a scholarly, traditional track career. I make less money, literally, because I don't get promoted to associate and tenured full professor—I don't have tenure—so I'm always at a year-to-year contract. While I

don't ever feel threatened that I'm going to lose my job, it's always there.

There's a cost to this, where it's not as respected by the academy as it should be, because teaching is not, compared to scholarship, which is unfortunate.

[1:05:36]

Berg Sometimes I hear the college get called “not a real college” or “not a real program.” Sometimes by people who should know better. That is a problem.

One of the things I think we—we're still working with an older curriculum that is very Western-focused. It's modeled on an older idea of exposure to the great classics of the Western world. I'm not as far along as I want to be on this, but we need to break out of that and make it more of a global curriculum that reflects the global diversity of the planet and our students without denying that the things the West produced are full of beauty as well.

We're in the middle of a rethinking. Sometimes it's a little bit of a hot moment, sometimes it's kind of cooled and we're in—it's in the background. But, we're in the middle of a debate of how to adjust our curriculum. So one of the things I think we need to work on changing is opening up our curriculum to a more global perspective to things.

[1:06:44]

Berg: Was that even the question you asked? I'm forgetting.

Morton: Um-hm.

Berg: Okay.

Morton: How have you tried to make your curriculum more globally focused?

Berg: I've had the opportunity to teach the Honors 189 course, which is the symposium in global studies, and I've done two versions of that course. One was a class on globalism and its responses. It was a very politics-, history-, economics-focused sort of course that dealt with Western globalist attitudes towards the market and domination, those sorts of things. We dealt with some of the blowback from that—fundamentalism from other parts of the world, climate crisis, poverty, those sorts of issues—a very politically heavy class.

I needed a break from that, so—I developed a long-standing interest in Buddhism and Eastern thought, so I developed a course in Eastern philosophy as a way of knowing and being in the world. We look at some non-Western ways of doing that.

[1:07:49]

Berg: That class is meant to be sort of a non-Western-focused course, and it has been before I got here as well. I've continued to try to expand what that is a little bit. So we do do this, but my criticism is—that's one class for the rest of the world and there are at least three that focus on Western Europe, the United States, plus the one that's just on the US, the symposium on American studies or American civilization, the 199 course [Contemporary American Civilization]. I'm doing what I can within the confines of that.

But, I have a lot of work still to do on that—that sort of broadening of the curriculum, as we all do.

Morton: On that note, historically, most students who come to Ball State, they're from the area, very close by, might have never been out of Indiana—so how do you think showing these students a different view of the world is going to benefit them?

[1:08:47]

Berg: I think, on one level, it's just exposure. I've had people tell me time and time again, "I've never thought that. I've never heard of that. This is so different." I had somebody in my global studies class tell me this semester that this course has changed her life. I think it's because of the ideas in the texts that we're reading. I take partial credit, but not complete credit for this. I'm like the midwife (laughs) to this process of self-discovery that she was going through, and maybe others are as well.

It's exposure to those different ideas, is the big thing. But, it's also exposure done in a loving and supportive environment, where we get to explore, we get to try, we get to work with each other on figuring out what these ideas are and what they might mean. I hope I have an environment in my classrooms where people don't feel intimidated, where they feel like they can—where they do feel like they can speak out, they can say what they think about something.

[1:09:46]

Berg: I think that's the case. I think that's what's going on. The evals [class evaluations] seem to suggest that, so the environment seems to suggest that. But, it also extends to just exposure on the study abroad trips that I do occasionally, or even trips to New York. If they haven't been out of the state, New York City is a very foreign and very strange place. Just being there—I like to think that there's an under-curriculum underneath the over-curriculum that we're doing.

So in the New York colloq that Dr. Powell and I did, the over-curriculum is, we're going to learn about these different ways of approaching New York, and

people writing about New York. That's the formal curriculum you'll see on the syllabus. But, the under-curriculum is really about learning to navigate the subway, learning to get around, dealing with people that are different from you on the street. I can't really teach that, I can just help students get exposure to it and put them in a place where they can have those experiences. And they learn those street smarts.

[1:10:50]

Berg: So when I was in Italy a number of years ago, a student said—they were trying to be very coy with me, they were trying to give me the slip—they didn't want me to come with them somewhere, and I was fine with that, but they didn't know I was fine with that. So they were saying, "We'd like to go to this town outside Rome. We want to take the train."

And I said, "Okay, let me help you out. Let's go to the station, I'll help you buy tickets." And they kind of had to very carefully say, "We'd rather figure this out on our own, if that's okay. You're not offended if we leave you?" I said, "Offended? No, I'm proud. This is great. Fantastic. Call me if you have trouble."

They didn't call me. It was great. They figured it out, and they were so proud of themselves for doing this. So that exposure and that practice was really critical, I think, for them.

That's my big answer to that one.

[1:11:38]

Morton: You mentioned that person who said this class changed her life. How did that make you feel when she told you that?

Berg: I'm still riding on that one. That was like two weeks ago. I'm still—I don't know if that was your section or somebody else, but it was a—yeah. That's good. It fits with what I think my mission is, which is not to give people an overview of the content of something—the over-curriculum. It's really that she was getting the under-curriculum. She was having a sense of, "Okay, I can take these ideas and I'm seeing how to look at my life in new ways that are powerful and useful and important to me."

And the excitement that she was expressing by saying that really made me feel like, Okay, I'm doing something worthwhile. Because, like any job, I have my down days where I feel like, What's the point of all this? Nobody cares.

That's not usually how I feel, but once in a while that feeling crops up. That comment from that student will keep me going for a long time.

[1:12:37]

Berg: But sometimes I see it in subtler ways too. The way a person's face looks, the way they're engaged, a question they ask—I can tell that they're processing and thinking about important things. Those little epiphanies occur every week, and once in a while I'll get a card or a letter from somebody who will say, "I'm still doing this thing. I'm still thinking about this thing, and that was useful."

One guy wrote me from the Middle East—he had been on some study abroad trip in Jordan—and they were meeting with some Jordanian lawmakers, and the lawmaker said, "Okay, there's five books you really should read to understand what's happening in the Middle East." And one of them was a book we had read in my global studies class. He wrote me and said, "I knew that book! I could talk about that book with this Jordanian lawmaker. It just blew me away that I could do that." I was like, "Great. Perfect."

Could I predict that? No. But, it set the ground work for this personal thing on his level that really made him thrilled. That's good. I like that.

[1:13:37]

Morton: You see all these honors students getting so much out of their honors education, and it makes me think of when we read the *Ball State University: An Interpretive History* book. They talked about some faculty who, at first, when honors first started at Ball State, they were kind of opposed to the whole program, because of a, quote, strong egalitarian impulse. They didn't want to allow this elite group of students to form. I was wondering if you had ever encountered that attitude with anybody that you've met on campus?

Berg: I've heard that that is sometimes an attitude among non-Honors students, to the Honors College students, but I've never witnessed it myself or directly experienced it. But, I'm a little insulated from that, I think.

I share those sentiments, and I wish that we could expand this to the entire population.

[1:14:37]

Berg: I don't think it should be a place for the few. In fact, I would probably get rid of the Honors College name if I had complete control over it. I think we're better seen as—this name is a little clunky, but I want to call it the "College of"—now that I'm saying this I'm going to forget it—"College of Interdisciplinary Creative Inquiry."

Because I think that's what we do. There's no reason why that small-class, discussion-focused, building-the-self curriculum should only be open to the

thirteen-hundred or so students who come to Ball State. We should make it so that everybody can do it. But, it requires the resources of faculty hires, classroom space, all the stuff that we're not willing to put the money into. If we were, we would have the whole college built like the Honors College, with just the majors and departments on top of that.

[1:15:38]

Berg: But, I don't have any control over that, so—and I wish it was broader, and my hope is that at least all of the honors students are going back to their regular departments and colleges and they're bringing what they're getting here, and they're hopefully sharing some of those ideas to the non-honors students that are in their major classes. So I'm hoping there's a bit of a working itself out into the general population.

Morton: I think that's a great point. I want to move up to now. In 2018, your rank is now associate teaching professor of Honors humanities. That's this new title you have—does it feel any different?

Berg: I was—not really. I was pleased at the recognition that Ball State University is giving, because contract faculty in academia don't necessarily get a lot of respect, yet we teach a good number of the courses at a lot of different universities. We're kind of the workhorses that way. I have a higher teaching load than tenure-track faculty, but I also don't have research requirements either, so there's give and take there.

[1:16:50]

Berg: It was a recognition that what we do matters, and recognizing quality service to the university. I was pleased during the negotiations that they didn't start calling us lecturers, that they recognized that there was something to be said for being in an assistant, an associate, and a full professor.

And I like that they put the “teaching” thing on there, because I'm very proud of what my role is. I don't lament that I'm not a scholar or a publisher of books and articles. I am a teacher. That is what I do, that is the thing I love. That's what I want to keep doing, so I'm pleased that that promotion system recognizes that there are different roles that we play. Whether it's—what are the other distinctions, I can't think of what they are—one for people that only do research for us. There are ones for people that only do teaching. I like that I'm called that. The title matters a little bit. It was a small thing.

[1:17:49]

Morton: Now, looking forward, what are your hopes for your professional future?

Berg: I want to continue to get better at creating unique experiences for my students. I want to get better at blending who I am as a person and an artist into the classroom. I want to see those things come together—not so my classes are about me, I don't mean that—but so that they're—I want to be fusing what I do in my artistic side with that I do in the teaching side, and keep bringing unusual and different experiences.

I want to get better at how I do assessment of learning, and how I can help students become self-assessors of their learning. Just evolve in those ways.

[1:18:44]

Berg: I feel rather settled in some ways, that I feel like I'm on a good plane where I'm—I've got a good grounding in who I am and what I am and what I'm doing, and I've got some confidence that comes with that, and some expertise and some feeling of accomplishment with what I've been able to do in the classroom and how I've grown as a person.

But, I feel like as soon as I stop feeling like growth is important is when I should retire and quit. I don't know—I want to retire for other reasons when the time comes, not because I'm jaded or I'm finished looking for new opportunities and new ways to approach ideas and help students learn.

I hope that that's what I'll keep doing, and I think I will because it's a deep part of who I am as a person. If that makes any sense.

Morton: Yeah. Thank you. Moving beyond all the school stuff, I did want to ask you a few things about your family. When did you and Debbie get married?

Berg: Nineteen ninety-four.

[1:19:44]

Morton: Where?

Berg: In Atlanta, Georgia.

Morton: Can you tell me about your two daughters? Their names and birthdays.

Berg: My older daughter is Sadie Berg. She was born in 2005. She is a math and science wiz. We're not sure how that happened, given who her parents are—an English professor and a history Honors professor—must be the recessive genes. She's whip-smart, plays the violin. She's the concert master for the Youth Symphony Orchestra, which performed at Emens [Auditorium] last weekend, so I'm very proud of her musical accomplishments. She's played on the stage where Bob Dylan performed—I can never say that, so I thought, All right, you go girl.

Two years after she was born, our daughter Georgia was born. They're now, as I'm speaking, they're 11 and 13.

[1:20:41]

Berg: Georgia is the artist of my two, more so. Does these crazy cartoons and drawings and is just obsessed with all things art. She's my art child, compared to my science and math child. They're lovely.

People told me before I had kids, "Oh, it'll change your life." And I thought, intellectually I get what you're saying, I understand that's true, but I also know I have no idea what you're talking about. That was pretty much accurate.

I'm very pleased that I'm able to be home a lot with them in the summer, and I'm not working a 60-hour workweek, or 50-hour workweek, and I can be home a lot with them. My Honors job allows me to be—helps me be a good father too, because I'm home a good bit of time. They're just fantastic.

Morton: I do have a "looking back" question. If you could speak to your 21-year-old self, what would you tell him?

[1:21:44]

Berg: He was a rather small-C conservative person. My politics have always been on the left, but I was a rather button-down, tight person. I had to learn to let go over time, and not be so worried about things. I would tell him to let his freak flag fly a little earlier in life, and not wait till he was almost 50 to fully embrace being an artist.

That said, I think I had to go through all that stuff to get to this point. My friend Juli Thorson, who teaches in philosophy here, we were in this little art collective together, and she said—we were talking about making work—and I said, "I feel like these paintings just come quickly. I can do one in like an hour." And she said, "Oh no. It took you 51 years and an hour to do that painting. You had to go through all this stuff."

[1:22:45]

Berg: I think I would tell him to be a little bit patient, but also to let yourself go a little bit. Don't be so uptight about things.

Morton: Great. Before we finish up, I was just wondering if there's anything that we didn't talk about that you wanted to talk about today?

Berg: Um—not that I can think of off the top of my head. I'm very pleased with where

I'm working, I'm proud to be part of the Honors College. I mentioned earlier, I love the support they give me, I love the creative freedom they give me, and they do that because they know it's good for the students and good for me.

That symbiosis is critical to our success there. I'm very proud to be working with all the colleagues I work with. I'm proud to be doing the work we're doing. I'm very proud to say that's where I am.

Morton: With that, we'll bring our interview to an end. On behalf of the Ball State University Honors College Oral History Project, I want to thank you, Professor Berg, for participating in our project.

Berg: Thanks to you all for having me. Glad to be here.

End of interview



Department of History
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1 April 2019

Timothy Berg, Ph.D.
Ball Honors House, Room 113
Muncie, IN 47306

Dear Professor Berg,

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to you for taking the time to speak with me for the Ball State University Honors College Oral History Project. It was fascinating to hear about your life and your time at the Honors College.

I was specifically interested in the changes you suggested for the Ball State Honors College. It was clear you have put much thought into the subject. Incorporating more non-Western ideas into Honors curriculum sounds like something that would benefit all students. As a student in your 189 class, I know it has benefitted me.

Thank you again for your dedication to honors education at Ball State and for your willingness to assist in our efforts to preserve the stories of the Honors College.

Best regards,

Margo Morton

**Subject research material and interview topics for Oral
History Interview with Professor Lisa Driver on 1 April
2019, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana.**

Lisa Driver Biography found on valpo.edu

Associate Professor of Theology

Biography

Born in Massachusetts, but really a Hoosier. I grew up certain I'd work outside or play basketball, hopefully both! My family entered the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod from Church of the Brethren and Presbyterian backgrounds. I was encouraged by all my pastors (at home and at college) to grow in understanding what I believed.

Undergraduate

Whitinger Scholar at Ball State where I got hooked on classics and fencing and met Eminence Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia through a history course on the Byzantine Empire. Created my own major in Medieval Studies to go with my major in Latin and minors in Greek (and I can't remember the others).

Graduate

Went to University of Toronto instead of University of Notre Dame because my advisors in classics and history and English thought it would be a good idea to leave Indiana at some point in my education. Took most courses through the Pontifical Institute of Medieval studies where I was engaged socially and intellectually with the riches of the Catholic tradition. My medieval interests kept going back in time as I discovered the voices of ancient brothers and sisters in the faith: the questions they asked, their way of life, their innovations in prayer and service. My Greek came in handy as I gravitated toward a project on early eastern Christianity: examining the pastoral issues of forgiveness and social disparities as well as the formation of Christian identity through asceticism and the cult of saints.

Joined a downtown LCMS church whose members included Christians from Eritreia, Iran, Ghana, Congo, Sri Lanka, Poland, Slovakia as well as some from US and Canada. Met a brilliant guy who was in a lot of my seminars and who eventually became my husband. Competed on the university's varsity fencing team (foil) for five years, captain for the foil team for 3 years.

Post-Ph.D.: Maryland

Lots of part-time teaching, surprised to be hired more in theology than history. Formed as an academic within Catholic communities: Loyola University in Maryland and St. Mary's Seminary. But couldn't land a long-term academic after five years of applications and lots of interview. Anxiously and painfully tried to conceive of a life outside academics (worked as a cultural historian for an engineering firm). Renewed by experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. As soon as we gave up, I was hired by Valparaiso University for the fall of 2000..

Valparaiso University

An on-going process of becoming: a scholar, a teacher, a mother and wife, a Catholic/Orthodox infused-Lutheran. Member of Immanuel Lutheran Church. Drawn to sharing both the life, thought and practices of earlier brothers and sisters in Christianity as well as the practices and prayer to believers today.

Interests

Teaching and Research Interests in Ancient and Medieval Christianity (Catholic, Orthodox and Assyrian)

- Worship and Devotional Practices
- Saints and Martyrs
- Christian Formation
- Asceticism
- Prayer
- Pre-modern Christian Social Teachings
- Missions and Adaption to New Cultures (Europe, Africa, India, Asia

Courses Taught

- Early Christianity
- Medieval Christianity: East and West
- Early Christian Social Teaching
- Christian Spiritual Traditions and Practices
- Eastern Christianity
- The Christian Tradition

UNIVERSITY CONCERT BAND PERSONNEL

<i>Flute</i> Rise Cogswell Cynthia Dowd Myra Foster Wendy Gauker Jodi Judd Lisa Mannering Julie Moore Tammy Semon	<i>B-flat Clarinet</i> Stacy Coalson Cheryl Conrad Christina Curtis Cheryl DeRolf Patty Dillon Rence Gehlbach Melissa Gregory Jeff Hoover Dawn Hudgings Stephanie Keller Sheryl Kincaid Kimberly Randinelli Lynette Rosenbach Teresa Schneider Kathy Zahnow	<i>Baritone Saxophone</i> Shana Kennedy Stephen Zukowsky	<i>Euphonium</i> Andrew Cook Jeff Frazee John Horine Joseph Neff Daniel Rice
<i>Piccolo</i> Leshia Clark		<i>Horn</i> Laurie Mathis Stuart Michael Cynthia Mueller Larry Purdue	<i>Tuba</i> Richard Branaman Soni Freeman David Lewis Linda Samworth Mike Wheatley
<i>Oboe</i> Sandra Gill Tammy Hill		<i>Trumpet</i> William Dicken Sandra Ege Steven Hawkins Denise Martin Lisa Maugans Michael Myers Mark Patrick Kelly Smeltzer Mary Beth Thomas	<i>Percussion</i> Stephen Kellams Kimberly Keown Steve Rivers Dan Snellenbarger John Wilson
<i>Bassoon</i> Kristi Julian Dale Potts	<i>Alto Saxophone</i> Aimee Dibble Ronald Jones Joe Stanley Gary Willis	<i>Trombone</i> Tracy Baker Brian Bartlett Patrick Cole David Hall Michael Igo Mark Middleton Laura Nordenbrook Tammylyn O'Connor Jennifer Taylor	
<i>E-flat Clarinet</i> Maggie Helms	<i>Tenor Saxophone</i> Lisa Jones John Papandria		
<i>Bass Clarinet</i> Mike Cranfill Bret Humbert			

SYMPHONY BAND PERSONNEL

<i>Flute</i> Myra Foster *Heidi Mendenhall Rebecca Rader Pam Roblin	<i>Bassoon</i> Gwyn Feldman Kris Julian *Kevin Royal	<i>Trumpet</i> William Dicken *Steve Hawkins Phil Ketcham	<i>Euphonium</i> Todd Boyll *Daniel Burton Todd Dazey Mike Johnson Cassandra Leshar
<i>Oboe</i> Mark Roberts	<i>Alto Saxophone</i> Chris DeFord Ron Jones John Papandria *Todd Young	<i>Horn</i> Greg Bell *Regena Emerson Soni Freeman Amy Hoevel Laurie Mathis Stuart Michael Cynthia Mueller	<i>Tuba</i> Richard Branaman Al Davis *David Lewis
<i>Clarinet</i> Stacy Coalson Cheryl Conrad Scott Cooper Christina Curtis *Maggie Helms Liz Hodges Dawn Hudgings Julie Jerndt Chris Nemeth Kimberly Randinelli Bill Rethlake	<i>Tenor Saxophone</i> Jeff Gill *Lisa Jones	<i>Trombone</i> Brian Bartlett *Keith Brakel Patrick Cole Jeff Frazee Chris Gordon Michael Igo Daniel Rice Greg Thomas	<i>Percussion</i> Kent Barnhart Lisa Head Dan Hughes Kimberly Hyden Donald Kalugyer Stephen Kellams *Debra McPhee *Kent Williams
<i>Bass Clarinet</i> Mike Cranfill *Bret Humbert	<i>Baritone Saxophone</i> *Gary Willis Stephen Zukowsky		
	<i>Coronet</i> *John Clark Jeff Ervin Tim Johnston Monica Kraft Joe Lara Brenda Miller Stan Noble Mike Wagers		<i>*principal</i>

Pre-Interview Contact Notes: Lisa Driver

Pre-Interview Time: 1:05-1:17 P.M., January 22, 2019

Pre-Interviewer: Nathan Rivers

- Dr. Driver attended Ball State from the years 1983-1988 as part of a five-year program. She was a double major in Latin and Medieval Studies. She also had three minors: Classics (she mentioned an emphasis in Greek), History, and English.
- While on campus, she was involved in campus ministry. She was also an editor for *The Odyssey* in 1987
- She indicated that her experience in the honors program shaped her whole life path, from the community it provided, to professors she could speak with, to the flexibility in advising available.
- She cited Richard Wires as being a particularly noteworthy professor, and added that there were rumors that he charted his honors intro course to get all the Whitinger Scholars
- After leaving Ball State, she went to the University of Toronto to earn her M.A. and Ph.D. in medieval studies.
- After graduating here, she indicated there being a “long waiting period.” She and her husband worked adjunct positions in the Baltimore, Maryland area, including in seminary schools and at Loyola University Maryland (then known as Loyola College in Maryland). She indicated that after 5 years, she and her husband were ready to give up on Academia before a position at Valparaiso University opened up for her.

TIMELINE

- Born January 9, 1965 (in Massachusetts)
- Graduated from Western high school in **1983**
- **1988**: graduated from Ball State.
- **Aug 1988-1989**: MA at University of Toronto
- **1996**: PhD at Toronto. How long.
- **1996-1997**: adjunct prof in history dept at Towson State University
- **1997-2000**: adjunct prof at St Mary's Seminary and University
- **1996-2000**: core prof at Loyola University in Maryland
- **2000-present**: Valparaiso
- **2006-2007** Sabbatical: Christ at the Center: The early Christian Era
- **2009**: book published.

1. Born January 9, 1965 (in Ayer, Massachusetts)

- a. How long in Mass?
- b. Parents, siblings.
- c. Did you like moving? Why move?
- d. Religious upbringing

2. Graduated from Western high school in 1983

- a. Activities
- b. "I grew up certain I'd work outside or play basketball, hopefully both!"
- c. Did you know what you would major in

3. 1983-1988: Ball State

- a. Why Ball State?
- b. Five-year program. Double major in Latin and Medieval Studies; created major herself. Three minors: Classics (Greek), History, English.
 - i. Learned about Eminence Metropolitan Kallistos through a history course on Byzantine Empire. Struck interest in classics
- c. Why Honors?
 - i. Whiting Scholar
 - ii. Honors was important to you: community, professors, flexibility
 - iii. Richard Wires: noteworthy professor
 - iv. Prior to Honors House in 2009, "Honors education existed geographically on the periphery of the campus setting, lacking cohesion bt its students & faculty" (B: 11). Did you experience this lack? How did you, as an Honors student, feel connected/disconnected to other students/faculty?
 - v. Did you live in Honors-only housing in Botsford/Swinford Hall in Johnson Complex (B: 37)? How do you think this made a difference in social & academic life?
 - vi. During your time, Honors classes were in Whiting Business Building and moved to Burkhardt in 1987. It wasn't until 2009 that Honors House & dorm were in such close proximity (B: 57). For Honors students since then, they have a strong connection to DeHority and the Honors house -- these buildings are part of what it means to be an Honors student at Ball State. Do you have any physical locations you strongly associate w ur HNR experience? If not, what does come to mind when you reflect on your time as an Honors student?
 - vii. Pretty great for you. Anything that you would have changed?
- d. Campus ministry
 - i. Congregational president of Grace Lutheran University Chapel 1987-1988
 - ii. Did your faith strengthen in college? How?
 - iii. What was it like being a religious student on this campus? Did you make it very well-known?
- e. Editor of Odyssey in 1987
- f. Fencing
- g. Trumpet in university concert band. Conductor Kirk Smith (1984).
 - i. Symphony band too. Joseph Scagnoli
- h. Perceptions of religion on campus

4. Aug 1988-1989: MA at University of Toronto

- a. Adviser said it would be good to leave Indiana
- b. Met future husband, Steven? In same seminars.
- c. Activities
 - i. Varsity Blues Fencing Team. Varsity fencing, captain for foil team for 3 years.
 - ii. Scottish Dancing Club
 - iii. Greek Index Project: researcher and data entry
 - iv. St John's Evangelical Lutheran Church: a little bit of everything
- d. Impact of honors?

5. 1993: married

6. 1996: PhD at Toronto. How long.

7. Adjunct: "long waiting period"

- a. 1996-1997: adjunct prof in **history** dept at Towson State University
- b. 1997-2000: adjunct prof at St Mary's **Seminary** and University
- c. 1996-2000: core prof at Loyola University in Maryland
 - i. What brought you to the area?
 - ii. What was your husband doing?
 - iii. Pre-interview: "long waiting period." Ready to give up on academia before Valpo. "Renewed by experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius" Valpo bio

8. 2000-present: Valparaiso

- a. Associate Professor of Theology. Tenured in 2004. Associate in 2009.
- b. Impact of your Honors edu on your teaching? Life?

9. Children: Nathaniel in 2001 and Zoe in 2004

10. 2006-2007 Sabbatical: Christ at the Center: The early Christian Era

- a. "Introduction to the main theological disputes and debates that helped shape the church in the period of early Christianity. ... Designed particularly for undergraduate courses in theology and religion"

11. 2009: book published.

12. Future?

1. Born January 9, 1965 (in Ayer, Massachusetts)

- a. How long in Mass?
- b. Parents, siblings.
- c. Did you like moving? Why move?
- d. Religious upbringing

2. Graduated from Western high school in 1983

- a. Activities
- b. "I grew up certain I'd work outside or play basketball, hopefully both!"
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- a. Why Ball State?
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- h. Perceptions of religion on campus

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- a. Adviser said it would be good to leave Indiana
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 - iv. St John's Evangelical Lutheran Church: a little bit of everything
- d. Impact of honors?

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- a. "Introduction to the main theological disputes and debates that helped shape the church in the period of early Christianity. ... Designed particularly for undergraduate courses in theology and religion"

11. 2009: book published.

12. Future?



Department of History
Burkhardt Building 213
Muncie, IN 47306-0480

5 April 2019

Lisa Driver, Ph.D.
Valparaiso University
Arts and Science Building 316
Valparaiso, IN 46383

Dear Professor Driver,

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to you for taking the time to speak with me for the Ball State University Honors College Oral History Project. It was fascinating to hear about your time in the Honors College and your successes since then.

Your story will be an excellent addition to our oral history collection. It was clear that the Honors College was an important part of your college experience and personal growth. Your experiences as a Whiting Scholar and a driven student appear to have been a great foundation for your further schooling and career.

Thank you again for your dedication to honors education at Ball State and for your willingness to assist in our efforts to preserve the stories of the Honors College.

Best regards,

Margo Morton

**Subject research material, interview topics, and
transcription for Oral History Interview with Professor
Jason Powell on 3 April 2019, Ball State University, Muncie,
Indiana.**

Pre-Interview Contact Notes: Jason Powell

Pre-Interview Time: 3:37-3:46 P.M., January 31, 2019

Pre-Interviewer: Nathan Rivers

- Dr. Powell did his Undergraduate work at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he majored in history and philosophy with a minor in literature. He then went to Ohio State University for his M.A. and his PhD., which he received in 2008. His PhD was for American and European Intellectual Cultural History.
- Dr. Powell indicated that this educational experience was a second career for him. He noted that he had attended a small bible college in the 80s and had taught high school for 3 years, but didn't elaborate further. He stated that he didn't usually talk about this period of his life.
- While in school, he was not involved in any extracurriculars due to having a wife and two kids already, with whom he spent the vast majority of his free time.
- Dr. Powell came to Ball State in 2008. He was hired originally by the History Department specifically to teach Honors Courses. In 2013, he, along with two other people (one of which being Tim Berg), were moved to full-time positions in the Honors College to teach humanities. Dr. Powell has been in this position ever since.

Timeline

1967: born

1982-1986: high school

??? Bible college, high school teacher

1989: married

94-97ish: birth of children

1999-2002: BA

2002-2008: MA & PhD

2008-2013: history dept, teaching honors

2013-present: full-time honors humanities

Ball State students participate in Occupy Indianapolis event

<https://www.ballstatedaily.com/article/2011/10/ball-state-students-participate-in-occupy-indianapolis-event>

Protesters say they want a new kind of democracy

12:00 a.m. Oct. 9, 2011

INDIANAPOLIS — About 1,000 people marched and protested for around two hours from the Veterans Memorial Plaza to Monument Circle Saturday, standing up peacefully against the one-percent of wealthiest Americans.

Chants of "We are the 99 percent" and "This is what democracy looks like," could be heard around the protests.

A Ball State student was one of the Occupy Indianapolis organizers. Kai Bennett, supervisor for the Ball State club Students for Creative Social Activism, voiced his opinions to the crowd using a microphone.

"We have gathered today as citizens of a new democracy. We have come from a world in which people have spoken for us, controlled us and used us for their profit, their entertainment and to serve their own interests," Kai Bennett said to the crowd.

Ball State students from the Inquiries in Global Studies and Inquiries in Contemporary American Civilization Honors classes taught by Jason Powell, assistant professor of history, were seen holding signs. Powell brought some students to downtown Indianapolis to get involved.

"In my classes, we talk a lot about social justice and poverty, and how to make a difference," he said.

Freshman English literature major Ben Linser said he wants to see corporate agendas out of politics.

"I hope we can finally separate the government from corporations, and stop the bribery and just everything that's ruining America," Linser said.

Freshman musical theater major Sara Dreibelbis said, "I just think the state America is in right now is f---ing a lot of people over. It's not fair, and no one is recognizing this, because we're all too comfortable where we are. Where we're going now is we're lifting the one-percent and we're doing nothing for ourselves."

Dreibelbis agreed with critics' comments about the 'Occupy' movement's lack of centralized goals or focus. She said, however, the ideas proposed at the Occupy

Indianapolis rally are "an important step." Marchers could be heard that day voicing angst over issues including education, health care, war and unemployment.

"Personally, I think the current system of capitalism is outdated ... We need to synthesize the ideals of socialism with capitalism together." said Adam Renner, history department graduate assistant and Occupy Indianapolis marcher. Renner believes industries like health care, insurance and education should be nationalized, not be privatized industries.

During the march, senior painting and visual communications major Nick Jones was seen giving a water bottle to Brad Melton, a homeless man sitting down, who held a cardboard sign that read "Homeless –Hungry-God bless." The sign contained a drawn-on cross and a smiley face.

John Joannette, executive director of Indianapolis-based Horizon House, a non-profit agency which assists the homeless, said government is "hurting the most vulnerable citizens" and he sees an increase in "families and individuals that played by the rules their whole life" at the facility he works at in Indianapolis.

Organizers said citizens gathered in small groups to discuss various economic and social issues and create lists of grievances and demands. Over time, public comments have been published via Occupy Indianapolis Facebook pages, a blog and a Twitter account.

First Sgt. Dave Bursten, Indiana State Police public information officer, said citizens had a permit to protest and "[protesters are] exercising their constitutional right, which is what this country is all about" but "they cannot infringe on the rights of other people." Protesters were told by Indiana State Police they cannot pitch tents and sleep outside of the Indiana Statehouse. State Police told people they could stay on Statehouse property that night only if they remained standing.

Bennett said a march will be held in Muncie on Oct. 18. The club's planning meeting will occur at the MT Cup, on Tuesday, Oct. 11 from 7-9 p.m.

'Beyond hunger' exposes educational drought in Latin America

<https://www.ballstatedaily.com/article/2010/04/beyond-hunger-exposes-educational-drought-in-latin-america>

12:00 a.m. April 29, 2010

Jason Powell's Honors 189 class is taking steps to help the approximately 40 million children in Latin America who drop out of school to work in the streets.

The students in his class took the initiative and planned Beyond Hunger: The Starving Minds of Central America, an event where people could come out to listen to music and student speakers.

Kayla Pickersgill is in Powell's class and was in charge of public relations for the event. She recruited Student Government Association, the Latino Student Union and Residence Hall Association as sponsors for the event.

"We learned about the situation in Latin America in the class and were all passionate about doing something about it," she said. "We thought this would be a great way to spread the message."

Pickersgill and her classmates began planning the event after Spring Break and recruited bands and speakers from the class.

Sophomore Brandon Buller and his band, The White River Vagabonds, performed various cover songs for the event.

"I was really inspired to take action," Buller said. "It was a way to use a gift I was given to attract people to a need much larger than me. As a human being, I have a duty to help."

The speakers focused on the impoverished people of Latin America and the lack of education given to children.

Buller said he didn't think people dug deep enough into social justice issues and he hoped people took away something from the event.

"People need to know that making a difference is easier than they think," he said. "They just need the desire to do something."

Powell said he was very pleased with the way the event turned out.

"This is the first time I've taught this class and I'm proud my students took the initiative," he said. "I wasn't sure what to expect, but the fact that this many people responded is very humbling and mind-blowing."

Topics outline

1. Early life

- a. Parents names, occupations, personalities
- b. Siblings
- c. Interests
- d. Seattle, Washington: what was it like

2. High school: Kings High School

- a. 1982-1986
- b. What type of student were you? What did you do on a normal weekend?
- c. Activities
- d. Significant teachers

3. 1986-1999

- a. Small Bible college and taught high school for 3 years... doesn't usually talk about this period of life.
- b. Grappling with religion

4. Married in 1989 to Kristina

- a. How meet?
- b. First kid in 1994/95? Symphony
- c. Soren in '96/'97?

5. Undergrad: Calvin College in Grand Rapids, 1999-2002

- a. Why Calvin College? How did you end up in Michigan?
- b. Why history and philosophy?
 - i. What were classes like
 - ii. Significant professors
- c. Minor in English literature
- d. Academic aspirations? Did you know you wanted to be a professor?

6. Grad school & PhD at OSU in Columbus 2002-2008

- a. Why there?
- b. 19th and 20th century American and European Intellectual and Cultural History ...

7. Ball State in 2008. First hired by History dept to teach Honors, then in 2013 full-time Associate Teaching Professor of Honors humanities

- a. Why here? How did you find job?
- b. What job did Kristina have?
- c. What interested you in teaching in the Honors College?

Topics outline

- d. What types of classes were you teaching?
 - i. HONR 189 and other classes: social justice focus
 - 1. In 2010, organized Beyond Hunger: The Starving Minds of Central America, an event to raise awareness about Latin American children dropping out of school to work.
 - a. <https://www.ballstatedaily.com/article/2010/04/beyond-hunger-exposes-educational-drought-in-latin-america>
 - 2. 189 & 199: brought students to Indy in 2011 to participate in Occupy Indianapolis event. Protesting against the one-percent of wealthiest Americans.
<https://www.ballstatedaily.com/article/2011/10/ball-state-students-participate-in-occupy-indianapolis-event>
 - 3. Current VBC project: Beneficence Family Scholars. Help single-parent families get out of generational poverty. Approached by Lydia Kotowski, but had already accepted to serve as a Virginia Ball Center for Creative Inquiry fellow.
 - 4. New York class
 - e. What's your pedagogy?
 - f. Dean James Ruebel (2000-2016) & current Dean John Emert
 - g. You're known for being very candid with students.
 - h. Anthony Edmonds and Bruce Geelhoed wrote in their Ball State University: An Interpretive History that "Some faculty opposed Honors at first due to a 'strong egalitarian impulse' to not allow an elite group of students to form."
 - i. Have you ever encountered this attitude? How did you react?
 - ii. Think there's any truth to statement; why or why not?
 - i. Edmonds and Geelhoed wrote that there have been faculty members who noted it would be a disadvantage to high-achieving students to not have honors. When you teach honors classes, what do you hope to offer that students wouldn't get in other class?
 - j. Differences between honors and non-honors students
 - k. What do you wish you could change about Honors at BSU?
 - l. Relationship with Prof Tim Berg
 - m. Hopes for future?
- 8. Personal life:** Wife & Kids, Free time

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FAX: 765-285-8149
Email: libarchives@bsu.edu

Ball State University Oral Histories

Archival Identification:

Digital Identification:

Interviewer(s): Margo Morton

Interviewee(s): Professor Jason Powell

Date of interview: April 3, 2019

Morton: Hello, my name is Margo Morton. Today's date is Wednesday, April 3, 2019. I'm interviewing Professor Jason Powell on the Ball State campus as part of the Ball State University Honors College Oral History Project. Thank you, Professor Powell, for agreeing to participate in this effort which we're conducting during this, the Honors College's 60th anniversary year. I'd like to begin by asking you where and when you were born.

Powell: I was born in Seattle, Washington, September 27, 1967.

Morton: How did you like Seattle?

Powell: I miss it every day. I lived there till I was 18, I went to college in Michigan. But, yeah—I love it. Still want to go back some day to live full time.

Morton: Did you ever think you would end up in the Midwest?

Powell: No (laughs). No, well—no, that's not—in high school, I knew I wanted to go to college in the Midwest. I think at that point I was just kind of ready to get out of the house. There's a reason why you move out when you're 18. I wanted to go twenty-five hundred miles away (laughs). Mom and dad are great and all, don't get me wrong.

[1:11]

Morton: Speaking of your mom and dad, can you tell about them, and any siblings that you have?

Powell: My parents, they've been—they got married in 1962, still together. Been going to the same church since before I was born. I have a younger sister who's seventeen months younger than I am. She has four children. Two of them are Ethiopian

twins—they flew to Ethiopia to adopt them when they were born. The other two are her and her husband's natural children. So my parents have six grandchildren.

We're an education family. My dad taught third grade for thirty years, my sister was a teacher until she started having kids, and my mom has been a swim instructor for thirty years.

Morton: Can you tell me the names of your parents and sister?

Powell: My mom's name is Vaila, V-a-i-l-a. It's a family name. We had a book written about our family back in the '70s—it was made into a cheesy PBS movie, too. She's named after one of the people in the book. My dad's name is Ray, and my sister's name is Mikelle, M-i-k-e-l-l-e.

[2:25]

Morton: You mentioned it was a teaching family. Did you always know you were going to end up teaching as well?

Powell: No, God no (laughs). I remember sitting—I'm officially an historian, and my junior year in AP History, I remember thinking, Why on God's green earth would anyone want to go teach history? This is the worst decision anyone could ever make.

I thought it was awful. I hated it.

Morton: What did you want to do?

Powell: I wanted—okay, this is getting into the part of my life that—I come from a hardcore, right-wing fundamentalist background. So I was going to be a minister. That was my goal.

Morton: Okay. So you—we'll get back to that.

Powell: (Laughs)

Morton: So you went to Kings High School in Seattle, you graduated in 1986. Can you tell me about what type of student you were in high school?

[3:24]

Powell: I was—I don't think I would have made it in the Honors College [laughs]. I was about a three-five student. I just really didn't care. I had a hard time caring about a lot of school.

But I was—I didn't really have to study too hard, I think I had a pretty good

aptitude for it. But I didn't really care for it. Part of it, you know—yeah, I didn't like it. I liked sports, I was just really into sports, so—and I played all the sports there.

Morton: What sports did you play?

Powell: Football, till I got horrible whiplash—I ended up in a neck brace. But, primarily in track. I was a state javelin thrower so yeah—got pretty good at that, and I did discus and shot as well.

Morton: So now can you tell me about, what did you do after you graduated high school?

[4:23]

Powell: I went to my little denominational school called Grace Bible College. About one-hundred and thirty students, but that was, just—someone would go to their Lutheran school or their Catholic school—I was raised in this really, kind of strange little denomination. And that was our school, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. So that's where I wanted to go, and sort of continue on, and—so I went through there and got ordained through that denomination.

And then after that, I went off to seminary and got a master's in theology, and that was when my denomination kicked me out, so (laughs)—which is a whole story in and of itself (laughs).

Morton: Where did you go for seminary school?

Powell: Grand Rapids Theological Seminary.

Morton: So can you tell me a little bit more, reflecting on your religious upbringing, what did you think about it at the time?

[5:26]

Powell: What I tell people today is that fundamentalism is not a list of beliefs; it's a worldview. And my worldview was about as small and singular—as all fundamentalism—there's religious fundamentalism, there's atheistic fundamentalism, there's scientific fundamentalism. Anyone who sees the world through a single lens is a fundamentalist, and then tries to beat other people into that worldview.

So I was immersed in it, really indoctrinated into it, went off to Bible college and then seminary, and so—that worldview didn't really begin to collapse till I was about 30 years old, and it hit me hard, because I had been in it so long.

I talk to a lot of students who lose their faith at 16, 17, 18, but because I was 30 it

hit me hard.

Morton: What year did you get your master's in theology?

Powell: Ninety-four.

[6:30]

Morton: So in 1989, you got married to Kristina. So can you tell me how you met?

Powell: I was dating her sister (laughs), and that didn't go well (laughs). I'm just a shitty person—I'm sorry, I probably shouldn't say shitty. Yes, I was dating her sister first. They're only eleven months apart, so my wife's six months older, so she graduated a year before me, so she was at the college a year before me. But, I came in with her sister, who also went to the college. We dated for a while—like a month—clear it wasn't going to work out. So I just thought I'd move up in the family (laughs). I just, I don't know, it was weird and I got made fun of back then and I still get made fun of today when I say this. Rightfully so—I have it coming.

[7:38]

Morton: So then, she was also part of that religious fundamentalism?

Powell: No, she grew up Catholic, but then her dad sort of ripped them out of the Catholic Church and forced her to get baptized at a Baptist church so she never—she ended up going to Grace Bible College because she was just living there and didn't know—she was involved in the youth group and some people from the college were there and so she—she had nowhere else to go. She just wanted to get out of the house. It was more of a matter of convenience for her, but she never really bought into the weird theological stuff.

Morton: So when you all got married, what was your consensus about religion? How were you going to approach it as a couple?

Powell: She was more—at that point, she was sort of embracing our form of Protestantism without really—but her heart was never into it. But, I didn't know that at the time. I was kind of blinded by my own, "We have the truth."

[8:45]

Powell: That was the biggest problem of my denomination, we're very small—they told us, Well, we're small because we have the truth and no one else does. And we were told—it was kind of cultic in some senses, a little bit.

So she just never bought into it, but I bought into it, hook, line, and sinker, because I was born into that tradition. But, she was always a little more skeptical

and never really—sort of always missed her Catholic roots.

Morton: I don't know if you mentioned it earlier—the name of the denomination you were in?

Powell: It's called the Grace Gospel Fellowship.

Morton: Did you ever serve as a priest in any church?

Powell: No—it would be a pastor in Protestantism, that's all right. My denomination kicked me out. I was actually teaching at the Bible college, so they asked me to come and teach. I was teaching classical Greek, and they found out that I disagreed with them on a number of theological issues so they fired me, said, You're not welcome here to teach. They revoked my ordination. So I didn't really have anywhere else to go. I didn't really know what to do.

[10:01]

Powell: That was in 1995. So I sold computers for a year, and in 1996 I started teaching high school, and I taught for three years.

Morton: What did you teach at the high school?

Powell: I was the religion and Bible teacher at a private high school.

Morton: What was the name of the high school?

Powell: Kings West High School. It was the sister school of the one that I had gone to.

Morton: Also around this time is when you had your first child.

Powell: Nineteen ninety-four is when my daughter was born.

Morton: And her name is Symphony. And then you had Soren...

Powell: In 1997.

Morton: Can you tell me a little bit about each of them?

Powell: Yeah, my daughter Symphony is—she's just a remarkable person.

[10:57]

Powell: She has a son now, Jude Michael, born January 10, 2019. She works at Ruler Foods right now, just kind of trying to figure out her future, what she wants to do.

And my son Soren is a junior here. He's a history major, minoring in poly sci and German. He's in the Honors College as well.

Morton: When you and Kris first had your kids, how did you plan on raising them, as far as religion goes?

Powell: Symphony was born when I was 27—I was already—we were still going to church, but our hearts weren't into it as much.

[12:00]

Powell: So for the first couple years, we were attending different churches, but I just—you know, it—so we just went to different Protestant churches. We tried out Presbyterian churches and other just—community churches, things like that. But, nothing really stuck and it was the year before Soren was born that I had my first real crisis of faith, and that really hit me hard. Right before—I was about 29 and a half, I guess. I still remember, because it was a book that did it to me. It was *The Flight of Peter Fromm*, by Martin Gardner. Kind of chewed me up inside (laughs).

Morton: So then you ended up going to get your bachelor of arts at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Why did you decide to do that?

Powell: We were living in Seattle, and I knew that I no longer wanted to study theology. I just—I was so tired of it, I'd been so sort of beat up by it, I guess. I wanted to do—I wanted to study philosophy, which I had already started doing some reading on while I was in Seattle teaching high school.

[13:18]

Powell: And Calvin College—there's a couple reasons. One, at that time, it had the best undergraduate program in philosophy for a liberal arts school in the country. It had a great name. It was back home in Grand Rapids, where my wife was from. But, the big thing is—to be honest with you—because the Bible college I went to wasn't even accredited, I would have had to start over as a brand-new freshman at a state school. At least, as a quote, unquote, Christian college—Calvin's Dutch-reformed—they at least recognized my bachelor's. So I could come in and just focus on my majors, so I ended up double-majoring in philosophy and history with a minor in literature.

Morton: When you entered Calvin College, at that point, did you know you were going to end up wanting to be a professor?

Powell: That was the goal. I was 32 years old, I knew I didn't want to teach high school anymore, and I knew I did not want to teach religion anymore. So we made the decision, you know—32 years old, two kids—that was like my ninth mid-life

crisis (laughs).

[14:28]

Powell: It was a struggle, because that was all—I'd sort of lost my faith, I lost my job. I was just in a relative state of—a lot of anxiety and angst about my future. So I thought, I'll go off, I'll go off to grad school, get a PhD. I love reading, I love writing, so that was at least the intention.

Morton: So you graduated from there in 2002, then you went to go to grad school and get your PhD at the Ohio State University.

Powell: Yeah, "the" Ohio State University—that's so stupid, I'm sorry.

Morton: What brought you to OSU?

Powell: I got into also Boston U[niversity], which would have been fun to study history, but the funding wasn't very well in Boston—the best apartments we could find, or the cheapest we could find, was two-thousand a month, an hour away from the school. Ohio State, at the time, was actually the better university. It was a top 25 history program. Rent was 600 a month and they guaranteed me full six years of funding to come in and do the PhD.

[15:36]

Powell: They had a strong program, and there was a couple intellectual historians that I really wanted to work with. Couple of them world-renowned. I had the opportunity to do that.

Columbus wasn't as—Columbus, Ohio, wasn't as sexy as Boston in that sense, but it was a—yeah, all right program.

I mean, it was a great program.

Morton: And you studied nineteenth- and twentieth-century American and European intellectual and cultural history.

Powell: Isn't that as pompous ass as it goes? I only say that like once a year. It's so stupid. That's officially what I—yeah. I'm an intellectual historian, so I study the history of art, literature, and philosophy, primarily. Mostly in the last few years, more philosophy and literature, but I used to do a lot with art history as well.

Morton: How do you think you incorporate that into your teaching today?

Powell: Because I'm a professor of humanities in the Honors College, it's really been the perfect fit. If I were teaching in a traditional history program, which would be

wonderful, I would get to teach my discipline of intellectual history probably once a year, once a semester, or maybe once every two years.

[16:50]

Powell: Because of my discipline teaching humanities, I teach my discipline, intellectual history, every semester. So I teach art, literature, and philosophy all the time, and I do the upper-division colloqs, where I do straight philosophy—one course on [Friedrich] Nietzsche, another on [Søren] Kierkegaard. I've done literary colloqs. And I still do history colloqs.

And I do a course on Latin American history, I do one on American social history. It really—my concentration, or my research interests, really align well with what I teach here in the Honors College.

Morton: Transitioning into the Honors College—you got your PhD in 2008, and then you were hired here right then and there. First, you were in the history department, but teaching honors, and then in 2013 is when you became a full-time professor of Honors humanities. So how did you find out about the job at Ball State?

[17:59]

Powell: I think it was just—you know, when you're in grad school, you're looking for all jobs, and you're applying for—they told us to apply to forty jobs, even if it didn't align—but it is—an intellectual historian, there was probably nineteen or twenty that I couldn't apply to.

So I got on-campus interviews at two of them. One at Walsh University in Canton, Ohio, but the other one at Ball State. But the one at Ball State really intrigued me. It was not a tenure-line position, but it was a three-year renewable contract with no deadlines on whether we could renew or not. But the idea of teaching this full spectrum of humanities, including social sciences—it really seemed fun.

So I applied and then, the interview was awful, because it was on the phone with like eight people on the other end, and I made a joke and no one laughed because they couldn't see my face and it was—I was trying to be sarcastic.

[19:03]

Powell: Then I said, "I'm sorry. That was a joke," and it was horrible, and then they all started laughing. But I thought, They're never going to call me back. I was very pleasantly surprised when they did.

Morton: Reflecting back on, when you first got this job, and thinking about your education at OSU, were there any influential professors that you had while you were there at

Ohio?

Powell: Yeah, my advisor—my advisor, Steven Conn, he was the intellectual and cultural historian, as an Americanist. But, he was less sort of intellectual. He didn't do as much in philosophy, did much more with art and architecture.

The European intellectual and cultural historian, Stephen Kern, was—he did more literature and he did quite a bit of philosophy as well, so that was a big influence. Really his focus was on modernism. Every book he's ever written has been on modernism.

[20:08]

Powell: So that got me interested in that era. But, it was a course my first year that I took—so we have two minors—my major field was intellectual and cultural history, and then we have two minor fields. So my first minor field was European modernism. My second minor field was American literature, and I worked with Brian McHale, who did his dissertation, back in the seventies, on John Dos Passos. So he had me read five Dos Passos novels in my first year, and I realized, that's what I want to do my dissertation on. I was so blown away by this 1920s writer.

So I think those three were probably my big influences.

Morton: Did you always have this attraction to big, philosophical thinking and thinking about art?

Powell: That's a great question. I literally became interested in intellectual and cultural history because I grew up in such an anti-intellectual environment. I grew up in an environment where the only thing you should be reading is your Bible. I really did.

[21:15]

Powell: My parents encouraged me to read, and I read—I always read a lot, I read the *Narnia* chronicles and the *Little House on the Prairie* series. Very young, I was reading as much as I could. So I was always encouraged to read, but my church background was more, You should read your Bible every day and as much as you can.

So I think that's why I wanted to do a background in theology without really ever loving the topic. So when I went back to Calvin, I realized that I really wanted to explore this intellectual world that had been denied. It was never said overtly, "it's the devil's work"—sometimes it might have been.

[22:09]

Powell: All these ideas were just blowing me away, and I just could not—and I was so far behind. I was 30 years old when I first started really reading on my own. I hadn't read anything, so I felt like I was ten years behind everyone else, so I just read and read as much as I could for the next, probably ten years. I just did not stop reading. Anything I could get my hand on. I read very broadly. I read literature, philosophy, science—still theology even, but now it was all the heavy hitters, the Germans and the French. Trying to really broaden my horizons.

So I became an intellectual and cultural historian because I came from a very strong tradition of anti-intellectualism, which is a subculture—a religious subculture of American history, so I was very fascinated by my own experience and how that fit into the larger context of American literature and ideas.

[23:10]

Powell: The movement that I study, the Lost Generation writers in the 1920s, is a countercultural movement.

Did that make any sense?

Morton: Yeah. It sounds like there's a lot of these topics that get you really excited. I was wondering how do you get your students excited about these topics?

Powell: I don't lie to them. I don't tell them, "You're going to use this out in the job market," because that's just bullshit. We all know it. What I try and convey is that the ideas that we're going to encounter in class have—I'm just very honest—they've changed my life. They've made me rethink everything.

Matter of fact, Dos Passos, the person I researched, once said that for every novel you read, you live a different life.

[24:09]

Powell: So if you read a thousand novels, you live a thousand lives. I've never forgotten that. So I try to convey this—literature, and philosophy, and all these ideas—it's an experience in itself. There's no means to one end here.

We always say it'll help for critical thinking, it'll help on the job market—and it's not that it won't help, but it's like, what about just loving ideas for themselves? As a human being, what's it mean to just flourish? And to take an idea and run with it and how to transform how we encounter the people, how we encounter our world, how we encounter ourselves in our relationship with that world.

I'm in lecture-mode here, you know. So once I really begin to fall in love with ideas, I wanted to communicate it—partly because those ideas have influenced so

deeply, both from the religious context of which I came, as well as trying to understand that context in the larger context of the entire intellectual world, which includes ideas from other cultures, other nations as well.

[25:19]

Morton: You mentioned how you don't lie to your students—

Powell: I try—don't get me wrong, I'm not afraid to lie to them (laughs), just not about that.

Morton: Well, it made me think of, you're known for being very candid with all of your students, and I was wondering how did you decide to take that approach with students, instead of being a little more stuffy or stereotypically professional?

Powell: I don't know if there's ever a moment—I'm just kind of a screw-up. Part of it is—because I just, the truth of it is, I'm really shallow. I just want to have fun. I figure if it's—people say, Oh you should teach this, but it's not fun to teach that. That's why I'll never teach Homer. I like Homer, but it's not fun to teach—I don't think, anyways. Plus, students got it in high school or middle school or whenever.

[26:18]

Powell: But, part of it is, I really—in other words, I really teach things that I'm deeply passionate about. And I think all professors do that, but I think, for me, it's not just passion about it, but it's stuff that's, or it's ideas that have really impacted or influenced me as well. So it's very easy to make that transition and sort of say, “This is what has influenced me. This is what has affected me so deeply. It's changed how I see the world, it's changed how I see myself. Come on this journey with me.”

And so, to me—and I guess early on, too, I've always seen the students—and this may sound really cheesy—but I've always seen the students as my colleagues. We're in this together. Let's grow together. So I love days when they write—I've had days in the classrooms where I've had my worldview transformed, like, “This is new. I've learned so much today.”

[27:28]

Powell: Those are really the fun days. We're interacting. When I was in grad school, there were students who were 24, 25 years old who already saw the student as the enemy. Like, “They don't love history as much as I do. Wow.” It's because you suck. They literally were condescending to the students. Why? They're 18 years old. You're in a core class. They're not going to love history like you do. They probably hate it, so make it fun instead of belittling them. These were also the

same people who just wanted to get their PhDs so they could be called doctor. They were very verbal about this. It's like, no. Yeah, don't. Just go away.

So I thought, We're in this together, let's just have fun learning about ideas, and if you don't like them, I understand totally. I try to have a blend of idealism and realism.

[28:21]

Morton: So now you've kind of touched on this a little bit, but I was wondering if you could talk about your pedagogy. What do you consider it to be?

Powell: It's a line I've used ever since grad school, that even when I taught straight history in grad school, it's like—I don't want to just inform, I want to transform. And I know that's a nice little alliteration, but I kept thinking about that. I know that when I have my students, a year from now, they're not going to remember anything we talked about with Aristotle or Plato. But, they're going to remember an environment where they could ask questions, where they could open up and think about things differently, about themselves, about the world

[29:22]

Powell: And I guess I'm one of those who believes that all knowledge is ultimately self-knowledge. All knowledge opens up who we are to the world. So my pedagogy is, how do we create an environment where students and myself can be open to all those ideas, and open to—that all discovery is a discovery of who we are as human beings and how we interact with our world. So that's that transformative process, because—I don't do exams, I'm not going to make you memorize a bunch of stuff. And there's a place for that, it's just—it's much more the sense of, how do we approach ideas in a meaningful way that makes us different people?

[30:10]

Powell: You've maybe heard me say it in class, even. If you're the same person at the end of four years, get your money back. You didn't get an education, all you got was job training. Is that why we're really here?

So yeah, my pedagogy is to really—I don't—one thing I don't do is I don't come in unbiased. I don't say, "We're going to look at both sides." We will look at both sides, but I try and say, "What's wrong here?" I want students to explore. I don't care what ideas they have, whether I think they're right or wrong, but I always want to challenge us, even if I agree with them. I get that you believe this, but why? What difference is it making in your life? Are you living according to this principle?

Morton: You say you want students to be transformed, and I was wondering if you have

any stories of students who have maybe come up to you and told you that your class did change them in some way.

[31:08]

Powell: This is the part I hate, because it feels like I'm braggin'—bragging—"braggin.'" In my eleven years, I probably have over a hundred emails that say those things. I've gotten it in course evals and in the number of one-on-one conversations that have—that the things we engaged in had had those transformational aspects on students.

So even now—again, this feels weird to say—I have sometimes as many as six to eight coffee dates in a week with students, and it's a pretty regular thing. And I'll have students share with me various traumas, sometimes assaults—I've had many students come out to me, and we'll just talk through all the dynamics of that.

[32:08]

Powell: I want to encounter students at the level where they feel open enough to share who they are as human beings with me. Yeah, I've gotten wonderful letters—sometimes it's formal letters actually mailed to me, sometimes in emails—of people talking about what the courses have meant or what I've meant to them.

And I write back—they've done that with me. I've helped some students who have their PhDs now, who still—he and his wife come down and spend a weekend with us once a year.

So those are—like I said, I try not to focus too much on the, "Look how neat..." Because, I realize how inauthentic I can be also, as well. I never feel like I'm living up to my ideals. So when I get those emails—and some of them are very strong about, "I'm a whole different person because of your classes," I never know what to say, because I feel like they're talking about someone else. It's like, if you only knew how inauthentic I can be to myself, that I don't even live up to my own ideals.

I try to, but I just suck at it.

Morton: It sounds like—you're getting these coffee dates with people or having these really close discussions with them—kind of sounds like you're going above and beyond what's normally expected of a professor. I have a feeling you probably don't think that that is an extra burden on you.

Powell: No, I don't. Yeah.

Morton: I was wondering, why is that part of your job to you?

[33:57]

Powell: I never really thought of it as part of my job, because I—like I said, it's not just the students are my colleagues, a lot of them are just my friends. In the classroom, there are some people you'll bond with more than others. I have had some students I've had some students five or six times in the classroom, and I don't even know the sound of their voice because they're so shy. And they're the ones that will often email me—I'll get an email at two in the morning, "I just want to let you know I love your class. I know I don't say anything..."

So I guess I just—it's probably—I think it's just partly kind of my personality. I just like more meaningful, authentic relationships. Not that everyone doesn't, but I'd much rather hang with one person for an evening and talk than ten people and go out and have fun. I'm very introverted that way anyway.

Yeah, let's go out and have coffee and talk and laugh and cry and do whatever. I don't want to go bowling (laughs).

[35:02]

Morton: While you were in grad school, or getting your PhD, you did some teaching, and I was wondering, now that you've had this experience teaching honors students, what have you found to be the differences in honors and non-honors?

Powell: Well, I've also taught non-honors here in the philosophy department. I taught for three of four years in the philosophy department, teaching ethics—intro and an upper-division course in phenomenology. So I've had a lot of non-honors students, and it's never really been a matter of intelligence. I've had so many non-honors students that are intelligent.

But, some of it is—honors students—not to belittle—but honors students are probably, in a nice way to say it, are a little more professional about their academic careers, sometimes. The way I say it is, if a non-honors student isn't interested in a topic, he or she may not read. Where if an honors student, they'll read because they want to get a good grade on a little quiz or on the assignment or whatever. I've had non-honors students say, I don't like this. [I'll say] "Did you read it?" [They'll say] "No, why should I? I don't like it."

[36:10]

Powell: And I've had honors students say that to me as well, don't get me wrong, but there's just a little more of—there's that sense of, they carried this through from high school. They already have that kind of motivated—sometimes it's not always the best motivation. Sometimes that performance mode has become their identity and they're afraid to shut that off, where that doesn't seem as maybe as intense sometimes with non-honors students.

But, some of them are just as hard on themselves. But, I've found that maybe that would kind of be one of the biggest differences, as a collection. Of course, there are many exceptions to the rules. Honors students are—to put it crass, they're very worried about their grade a lot of times. You know how that is. But it's not a bad thing, to take their work seriously, but sometimes they—a non-honors student will say, "Eh, I got a C." A C to an honors student is like—yeah, "I might as well die now. It's over" (laughs).

[37:15]

Morton: Thinking more about the distinctions between honors and non-honors, we read Anthony Edmonds and Bruce Geelhoed's book, *Ball State University: An Interpretive History*—they wrote that there have been faculty members who have noted it would be a disadvantage to these high-achieving students to not have an honors program. So when you teach your honors classes, what do you hope you're offering to the students that they wouldn't get in another class?

Powell: That's a really good question. I don't know if I've really thought about it, because when I've taught my non-honors classes in the philosophy department, I try the same approach. I try to engage on the same levels that I do. I try and bring my A-game and teach passionately and engage.

[38:13]

Powell: And so it's—I think what the Honors College really, to me is, is that when I taught my non-honors classes, they would always—when I talk about the humanities [the three-course honors humanities sequence], it was, "Well how come we don't get that?" And so, it's a three-semester sequence of art, literature, philosophy. They're like, "That sounds so cool." That's the big thing, I think, that really—I think the honors students get a little broader perspective, and they get—because they still have to take the history class, but then they get this on top.

And I'm a believer. I think that what we do in the Honors College should be taught school-wide. I just think it should be part of the core. And I've had non-honors students say, It's not fair. And other honors students will tell me, Yeah, my roommate, who's not in the Honors College, is jealous that I get to do these cool classes.

I don't think these things should be for the top students or the elite students. I think they should be universal things.

[39:13]

Powell: Like, I don't understand why philosophy isn't taught at the high school level. I don't get it. How to think, how to think creatively. It's like, why don't we teach

that at the high school level? It's not meant to be an intellectual discipline only for a select few. It should really be universal things.

Morton: You're kind of speaking to the next question I wanted to ask you about—

Powell: Because I knew that (laughs).

Morton: Also in the book that we read, they said some faculty opposed honors when it was first introduced at Ball State—

Powell: Oh, I didn't know that. Oh, interesting.

Morton: Yeah, because of a strong egalitarian impulse to not allow an elite group of students to form. When thinking about that statement, have you encountered other faculty who have ever thought that way?

Powell: I think I even think that way, as well. Let's be blunt—college matriculation across the country is sixty percent women, forty percent men, and the Honors College is about seventy-five/twenty-five.

[40:14]

Powell: They're predominantly white, middle- and upper-middle class. There's a clear lack of diversity—now, that's changing. We have a diversity committee that's really trying to promote this, we're trying to even reach out to marginalized or disadvantaged communities to look at a much broader spectrum of students. But, this has been later in the game.

There is a sense where—one thing I liked about teaching non-honors students was, I had so much more diversity, just as far as cultural backgrounds, as well as intellectual backgrounds. In the Honors College, there are a lot of hard science majors—which are wonderful—a lot of business majors. But, I had such a broader spectrum of even majors and interests in non-honors classes, in the core at least.

[41:21]

Powell: I think the Honors College is an incredible thing, but I know students who have said, Wow, I was going to be in honors but I didn't want to do the extra work. I don't think it's extra work. As far as the core, it can be a little, an extra class or two. "Oh, they're harder." I don't think they are. They're just different.

I really believe the program we're doing here in Honors is really a wonderful program, but I would like to see it university-wide, I just think it would be wonderful. I don't mean erase the Honors College, necessarily. There's still—the other advantage we have is that they're capped at 25 for core and they're capped at 15 for upper-division colloqs or electives. There's something unique about that,

and I don't know, with the population of Ball State, if they can shrink them down like that. I don't know if they could do that aspect of it. So there is something unique about the Honors College.

[42:21]

Powell: The way I describe it, it's a small liberal arts school in a larger university, so it's the best of both worlds. So there's wonderful aspects to it. I think we're moving in a positive direction on trying to make it more accessible to a wider group of people that are coming out of high school.

Morton: So it sounds like you really understand and acknowledge the lack of diversity that's been found in the Honors College. Do you think, over the years, that your honors students have also understood and acknowledged it?

Powell: We talk about it very openly in class, depending on the class topic. The students are well aware. There's many times that I have to challenge students, because they'll talk about gender discrimination or racial discrimination, and I'll say, "What about economic discrimination? All of you sitting here—most of you come from well-to-do-homes—not everyone, but, do you challenge that? Who you are as a consumer—do you realize the reality you live is not the reality for millions of people in this country who are either trapped in generational poverty or who have never had that shot. You're all up in peoples' face about these other things, but are you confronting how you engage the world yourself?"

[43:48]

Powell: We really—how do you—this is one of the biggest questions, is how do you get students, whoever they are, how do you get students to realize the urgency of something that they themselves don't feel? (shrugs) This is the big question. How do you get people to be empathetic?

When most of us—and it's not that the students are calloused, but it's like, if it's not on my radar, I don't really think about it. How do you get them to not only think about it, but to realize that maybe the way they encounter the world isn't right? Or is bigoted in many ways, but bigoted not necessarily in terms of race or gender, but bigoted in terms of class and sort of a, "Well I've worked my way here." Well, you were raised in a family that really gave you all those opportunities to do that.

[44:46]

Powell: There's ways to challenge that demographic that's in the Honors College to really think beyond their own experience and say, "Okay, what does it mean to really confront how I live?"

Morton: That brings me to talking more specifically about the classes that you've taught over the years. Looking through some older materials, I found a few different examples. In 2010, you helped, with a class, organize this event called Beyond Hunger: The Starving Minds of Central America. This was to raise awareness about Latin American children dropping out of school to go to work. Can you tell me a little bit more about how that came to be?

Powell: That was the first 189 I ever taught. They asked me to do it and I thought—so it has to on some aspect of the non-Western world. I'd been intrigued by Latin America because during the nineteenth century, Europe kind of beat up on Asia and Africa, but as an American historian, I realized we had done the same thing to South America, or to really everything—the north American countries of Mexico and the central American countries.

[46:05]

Powell: I really wanted to understand that relationship. So for a final project, I didn't really even know what to have them do, so someone said, "Why don't we plan an event?" And it was a lot of fun. I don't know how effective it was in the long run—we had about a hundred people show up for it, it was fun, we had students share, we had a little documentary. The students really worked hard and really were—I think, thought it was a beneficial experience. I don't have a lasting impact, but—I hadn't even thought about that. I mean, I've thought about it. But, it was the only year I did it because, for one, I didn't know how to grade it, and back then I was worried about putting a grade on everything, and some students didn't do very much work. That's why I hate group projects.

[46:56]

Powell: But, yeah. It was to try and—the class was so—and I still teach that 189 on Latin America. The number one response I get is, "How come we didn't know about this stuff?" The fact that we overthrew Guatemala in 1954, the first democratically elected government, just a year after overthrowing the president of Iran, their first democratically elected government—all over oil. And my students ask, "How come we didn't know this stuff?"

That first time I taught it, the students were like, We've got to tell the world. Yeah, I mean, it's kind of common knowledge in these countries. So they really wanted to do something to disseminate that message.

Morton: The year after that, you brought students from your 189 class and 199 class to Indianapolis to participate in the Occupy Indianapolis movement—

Powell: Oh my gosh, where are you getting this stuff from?

Morton: *The Daily News* website.

Powell: (Laughs)

Morton: I was interested in that—okay, that was a protest against the one percent of wealthiest Americans. I'm just really interested in how you decided to do that?

[48:14]

Powell: The Occupy Movement of 2011, I'll be honest—when it first started up, I thought, This is not going to go on anywhere, because you have no power over these corporations. When people like Martin Luther King and Gandhi were protesting against injustice, they understood that we can't do anything if we don't have economic control of the region.

So Gandhi—I mean, how many hundreds of millions of native Indians just quit buying British products? Britain didn't leave because they thought, "Oh, we're morally wrong here." They left because they couldn't afford it anymore. Same with the United States—they didn't say, Oh, we need to be less racist. Martin Luther King made it so economically uncomfortable for them that they just couldn't afford to do this. And it ended up changing legislation.

[49:06]

Powell: So the Occupy Movement's like, Oh, were going to bring down corporations. No, you're not. I remember watching Fox News during that time and they were just laughing at them. And I thought, This thing's a joke. But, I thought, let's go down. So my heart wasn't really even into it at the time but I thought, some students wanted to go down. I said, "Let's go down as a group."

So we took a number of them down. And it was a lot of fun. I participated but I just was still—and of course the thing crumbled just a couple weeks later, because they just didn't really have the ability to organize. How do you bring down a four-hundred-billion-dollar multinational corporation like Exxon? You're just not going to, by protest. There has to be actual legislation that's going to do that.

But, I was—I think I was sort of testing out my own—like, how much of an activist do I want to be? In other words, do I want to put my energies there, do I want to put my energies in encouraging students to do that?

[50:06]

Powell: And I think after that—and we've done some other things—I thought, I don't know if it's effective for me to spend my time running around doing these things. I'd rather really try and concentrate on helping the students to decide whether they want to get engaged at that level.

Morton: Can you think of any other experiences that you've cultivated in your classes that are a little more unique like that over the years?

Powell: I don't know—I'm trying to think. No—after 2011, I think I got really dull (laughs). No, and I think that's when I really began to start teaching about generational poverty a lot more and social injustice, and so it was still on my radar, but I really wanted to focus on the classroom.

[51:11]

Powell: So I don't know if I've done a whole lot, until this semester—the Virginia Ball Center has, of course, been the big one.

Morton: Yes, we can talk more about that now. So you're currently teaching a class at the Virginia Ball Center for Creative Inquiry. It's the Beneficence Family Scholars. So can you tell me more about how that project came to be and what you've been doing?

Powell: It's a fascinating—it's really a fun story. In July, I got an email from Jen Blackmer, the director of the VBC, and one of the fellows had to drop out. I think it's because they had two people from English, and I think the chair, Cathy Day, said, "I can't lose two faculty in one semester." So all of the sudden, there was this hole. I knew Jen, and I'd always been—they've been asking me for years, Come over to do a VBC project. But, I didn't know what to do.

[52:10]

Powell: Because you have to have a product at the end. I was thinking, what are we going to do, read? I never—I just was never very creative. but, I thought, Okay, I can do this. And I thought I'd do something with generational poverty, but I wasn't sure.

So she sent the email, and I went out and right away talked to John Emert [Honors College dean], because I had to get permission to do that, and he said, "Yeah." And about three days later, Lydia Kotowski emailed me, and I'd never even had Lydia in class. But, we had talked a few times, and she knew that I had done a lot with generational poverty. And she goes, "I have an opportunity I want to present to you."

So she came up a few days later, on a Friday. She drove up from Louisville [Kentucky], so a three-hour drive. She presented what'd she been doing at Family Scholar House, which is *the* non-profit of non-profits.

[53:08]

Powell: When it comes to generational poverty, there's all types of non-profits that will focus on food security, childcare, healthcare, all those types of things, or

education. But, the Family Scholar House, they do it all. They hit every aspect of generational poverty.

Turns out, they are the only one in the country really doing it like this. There was an article a year ago, last April, in *The Washington Post* about them, so now they're getting inundated with calls. Lydia said, "I can't believe the work they're doing. It's transformative." At Family Scholar House, when it started in 1995, it was started by a group of nuns. By 2003, they were only working with four families. Then they hired their current president, Cathe Dykstra, who's like a force of nature. Now they work with 280 families with, like, 900 on the waitlist. Their graduation rate is up in the ninetieth percentile, or above that. It's just remarkable.

[54:09]

Powell: So Lydia came up, presented it, and she said, "I want to do something like this in Muncie." I thought, Well, maybe we could do this as a VBC. And I said, "Lydia, tell you what. Write me a proposal." And I thought, I'll get a proposal in a couple weeks, it will be few pages. Three days later, I had a sixteen-page proposal—all the names, dates, who we should contact. I was like, Okay, this is too much for me. It was beautiful. Then I went back to Jen and said, "Here's my idea."

At the same time, we have to have community partner—the Excel Center hadn't even started yet. It's an adult high school here in Muncie that started in July, and I walked in and they hadn't even started yet. They do the same thing we're trying to do at the high school level. It's an adult, Core 40 high school, and the average age of their students is 29. So they have people who—I wouldn't want to go back to school at 29—I think their oldest person is 67. They have childcare, they do it all and it's just amazing.

[55:14]

Powell: And I go in there, and the guy I met said, "I was just going to email someone at Ball State." They guy I met just happened to be the college and career person, and his name is Jason and he's an historian. So I tell this story and people have asked me, "Do you believe in God?" And I said, "Well if I do, it's because they paved in front of Cooper [Science Complex]." That's my theology. You remember how horrible that was, Riverside [Avenue]? So they paved that, and it's like, if there's a God, it's because of that, not because of this other stuff.

But this just all fell together within a week. It was so weird. Now here we are, we are building a non-profit. We're in our—it's three phases. We're doing the pre-residential part. We're going to get our families up and going, and we have programming, the whole ball of wax. We're seeking donors and we're having conversations with big donors to get funding.

[56:13]

Powell: We hope to bring in our first students in the fall of 2020. We have a remarkable board. We have two board members that everyone knows in the city, who are very active in the Whitley community and have been working with generational poverty for years and understand how to build a non-profit. I have no idea how to build one. I'm the wrong person for the job. But I just have an incredible group.

Morton: Why did Muncie need something like this?

Powell: Muncie is like a lot of post-industrial towns, but almost doubly hit. A lot of towns lost their auto factories—well, Muncie lost its auto factory in the seventies, but it also lost the Ball factory. So after the seventies, the economy really collapsed. Outside of the hospital and the school, which are the two largest employers, the rest of it's a retail economy. It's minimum wage. You can't build much of an economy that way. The poverty rate in Muncie is at twenty-one percent, which is above the national average. But even those poverty rates are skewed because they're still from 1964, I think. It's actually much higher than that.

[57:27]

Powell: But the poverty rate amongst single parents—which is who we work with so they can have that education, a change to get a four-year degree—the poverty rate among single parents in Muncie is at forty percent. They just really struggle. And I should say, that's what we're about. Beneficence Family Scholars is to provide all those opportunities so these students can get a four-year degree, as much as fully funded as possible. We use all the networks we can and all the government options as well.

Morton: What will be the end product of this semester?

[58:08]

Powell: This semester is—we're launching our pre-residential program, so it's getting the foundation set, so we built—our potential scholars will come in, they have to go through orientation, they've got to start programming. And the programming is things like financial literacy, cooking classes, things like that. But, what's unique about what we're doing that's different than Family Scholar House in Louisville, is we're also developing humanities programming. The idea is to encourage parents to read to their children, so we have one on civil rights, two on dance, one on *The Hunger Games*. The idea is getting parents to read to their children.

So the purpose of Beneficence Family Scholars is for single parents to go to school and all they have to do is concentrate on their education and their children's education. So we're building scholars from a very young age as well. We're building all this programming, so they'll start those things, we'll start

getting in the process of housing and developing childcare.

[59:07]

Powell: Phase two is the residential program. We're actually able to provide housing for our scholars and their families. Phase three is the post-residential program. So we're still a year away from the residential, but that's what we're trying to set up now. We're trying to look at housing options and that will start in 2020. And of course, the post-residential will be a few years after that. We'll have those liaisons that will help them, once they've graduated, to find jobs that are meaningful to them.

Family Scholar House in Louisville has eighteen full-time staff. All their program is just devoted to their students and their children. They have over two thousand volunteers who help in this process. We're trying to continue to grow that base of people who are interested.

Morton: How has it been different teaching one fifteen-credit hour class at VBC compared to normal class?

[1:00:05]

Powell: Yeah, I don't like it. I mean it's—it has been a great experience. But, I've got to be honest, I really miss the classroom. Partly because the idea of the VBC is that it's student-led, and we have such a dynamic group. Usually these VBCs, you have up to 15 students—we have 16 because they allowed me an extra one. But sometimes they have trouble meeting the 10 minimum, because it's hard for a student to take a whole semester off. We had 44 applications. I didn't even go outside the Honors College, because I thought, I'll start with what I know.

It was just because this project, it really sells itself. It was so amazing, so students were like, "I want to be a part of this." We had eighteen freshmen apply. At that point, they'd been a student for a whopping four weeks at Ball State, so I didn't take any freshmen, but their hearts really wanted to be involved.

It's not that I haven't enjoyed it, but I really kind of worked myself out of a job, I'm just kind of supervising. The students—Lydia is like a force of nature herself. I have such talented students. I do a lot of behind-the-scenes work, but I'm not in there talking about all the ideas I love, so I miss the classroom, but I will really miss working with this group full-time, but I'm ready to get back to the classroom.

I think part of that is just because, it's such a wonderful thing we're doing, but I feel so underqualified for it. What's a humanities professor doing, starting a non-profit? I was president for, like, three weeks. Because I have the letters behind my name. Lydia, after a while, says, "I've been doing some research and it turns out,

you don't need the letters after your name. So do you want to be president?" I said, "Oh, God no. She goes, "You want to be vice president, and I'll be president?" I said, "Oh please, yes, thank you."

[1:02:04]

Powell: So I was president for three weeks, and now I'm vice president, which—I don't know what that means either, but I'm on the board. But, I'm there to—I want to continue on with this project, but I'm not the right person to lead it. I realize that. I knew that from the beginning, that there's so many talented people that know what goes into running a non-profit. I don't know those things.

I think the two things I can maybe sort of be proud of is: I'm very aware of my own limitations, and I think I have a good eye for other people who are much more talented than I am. I'll brag about that. I know where I suck and where other people don't suck.

Morton: Thinking about lessons you've learned, like the two you've mentioned, how do you think you'll apply this experience to your further teaching experiences?

Powell: I've been thinking a lot about this.

[1:03:02]

Powell: I felt, over the years, I've felt like such a hypocrite, because I talked a lot about generational poverty, but I don't know any poor people. I live in Yorktown. When we moved here, we said, "Oh, Yorktown's a good school." We didn't know anything. Now we live on a little country road, which I hate, because I'm a city boy. I like our house, but it's just—you know. And I work here at Ball State, in the Honors College, so I wasn't in contact—I'm very much introverted—I just don't go out and meet new people. I'd rather stay home and read and just be with my family.

So I didn't know how to bridge that gap between my ideals of making a change and not knowing how to do that. Beneficence Family Scholars—or BFS—is providing that opportunity. I think a lot of students in the Honors College feel exactly like I do. I think they want to do something, they just don't know how.

[1:04:02]

Powell: Some of them might be a little indifferent about their economic privilege, and that's not always true. Some of them are, but a lot of them are like, "Yeah, I realize that, and I want to make a difference, but I don't know what to do."

We all believe in education, so I'm trying to think about, How do I get my classes out there in the community? Now BFS is one of the ways I can do that. I'm going

to talk about it every semester, at least once or twice probably. “Here’s opportunities, if you want to get involved.” Put your ideals to life and move out into that direction.

Because the focus of BFS is education—both for the children and for the single parents—it’s something all of our students can connect with. We’re all here because we believe in education, even if it’s just, “Well, I’m doing this to get a job.” Which is fine. But, education really should be about enlarging our worldview and our understanding of how we interact with the world.

[1:05:08]

Powell: To be honest with you, I don’t know how it’s going to look. Because I don’t want to beat the drum, like, “Here’s the organization I started.” I want to encourage them, if you don’t know what you want to do and you want to do something, we could always use help. We would love your talents.

Morton: Something kind of random I picked up on that you were just talking about—

Powell: (laughs) Sorry, I’ve had a lot of random—

Morton: I was wondering how it is to be a self-identified “city boy” living in Muncie, Indiana.

Powell: This is the first time I’ve lived anywhere under seven-hundred thousand people. Well, greater Grand Rapids was seven-hundred thousand, but we lived right in the mix of it. I’ve always lived in big cities, or suburbia. In Columbus, we lived just outside in a suburb that was closer to the school than other parts of the city.

[1:06:01]

Powell: I’ve always lived in big cities. My wife is much more small-town Michigan. I think that was part of it—when I first came to Muncie, I think I had some of this big-city elitism in my mind. “Well, Muncie doesn’t have these things and it’s poor and it’s stupid, and blah-blah-blah.”

I realized my attitude was kind of bad sometimes, because I really missed the cities, but I didn’t realize it was my own hubris. How do you make fun of a town that’s really been hit hard economically and culturally? There’s a lot culturally going on, over the last fifty years.

It was probably halfway through my tenure year that I realized, you know what, I got to put my money where my mouth is. I need to get involved in the community. But, again, I just didn’t know how. That’s how this opportunity has come.

[1:07:06]

Powell: Muncie kind of grows on you. The mall is wonderful (laughs)—it's just terrible. But, there's so much potential. It's a hurting and struggling city. I realize that if I'm going to be here, then I need to be a part of—a very small part of helping to see it thrive in different ways.

Morton: You made me think of some of the research we've done in the class. They've always talked about how Ball State has been a little isolated from the rest of Muncie. I was wondering what you think about that. Do you think your students know about the struggles of Muncie, or do they kind of ignore it, or just not know it?

Powell: My students now, or my students generally at the Honors College?

Morton: In general.

Powell: Of course, we have students from Muncie who are well aware.

[1:08:07]

Powell: I think to a lot of students in the Honors College, Muncie can be a little bit of a running joke, in the sense of—there's brain drain. During the summers, students leave because there's just not the opportunities here. You have Indy an hour away, or Fort Wayne the other way. I even have students say, "I'd love to stay here after graduation, but there's nothing for me to do here. There's no job." It's this place that's lacking in opportunities, which is one of the reasons why we wanted to create BFS—to invest in people who already live here and want to make a change here. Our graduates hopefully will stay in the community and begin to help the community flourish in different ways.

I think Muncie has this reputation of even students coming in, "This is a place where I'm going to come get an education, and then I'm going to leave."

[1:09:07]

Powell: How do we begin to change that dynamic? It is hard, because how do you get people to stay when there's not much to stay for, at least not the opportunities that other big cities have? But, that's the catch-22. How do you get them to stay to build to do that when there's nothing to stay for? We've got to start that process and get people committed to staying here and move up.

A lot of people do stay, but—I think I heard once that Indiana has one of the biggest problems of brain drain, mostly because it's surrounded by so many big cities. You've got Louisville, Cincinnati, Columbus, Ohio even. Of course, Chicago up north. We have so many big cities, and Indy has a lot, but people will

tend to leave the state to get those jobs. Indiana, I think, struggles a little with that as well, and Muncie certainly part of that, because economically, it has struggled.

[1:10:10]

Morton: Now you're making me think about the different classes you've had that involved traveling outside of Muncie. Can you tell me about the international traveling that you've done within the Honors College?

Powell: The first classes I taught that involved a field experience were to New York City. Two-thousand and eleven was the first time. It was the first time we did a course that went to New York, and I've done it four times—you [Morton] were on the fourth one with us in 2018. They were always wonderful experiences. People always want to get out of the US to see culture, but there's no city like New York. There's no city like Paris or Rome, either, but there's no city with as much cultural pluralism and dynamism as New York City. Everyone in the world knows it's unique that way.

[1:11:07]

Powell: That was the first thing, and it can be done relatively cheaply, as compared to a flight to Europe. So I've done New York City four different times. I've traveled overseas—the first in 2016, I went with a group that went to Italy, but I was just the faculty travel-along. We always need two faculty members, or two professors to go on a trip. We were asked to go Italy with a group, which was a lot of fun. I didn't teach class, I didn't have a lot of responsibility. Mostly, I just made fun of students, we laughed a lot.

After the nine-hundredth statue, we started becoming our own art critics and just making up stupid stuff, to say why the artist had done it. But it was an incredible trip.

[1:12:00]

Powell: Eight months later, I taught a class that involved a field experience to Ireland. It was fun. It wasn't real deep, it was just Irish culture and history. Dr. Emert had been teaching it for a number of years, but always taught it as a one-credit colloq over spring break. So we taught it as a three-credit class. We had a ball. We went into Northern Ireland, we spent time talking about the troubles—the Irish sort of “civil war” in Northern Ireland, which was really an amazing experience overall. I'll be teaching it again next spring, a year from now.

This semester, I was also involved—[Assistant Professor of honors humanities] Obed Frausto—I think is the first colloq to do a field experience to Mexico. They did it on Chiapas, the southernmost state, city of San Cristobal and the Zapatista movement in Southern Mexico, which was a movement—an indigenous

community with a non-globalized economy, so everything there stays, and it's really a dynamic community.

[1:13:09]

Powell: Again, I was the traveling professor for that. That one was so unique because they were there to study a revolutionary movement rather than a “vacation” type trip, though we did the tourist things as well. But, we really got to see how the indigenous Mayan people have worked to have a sustainable community that's really, really neat.

I believe that those are foundational. Next year, Obed wants to do another one, but to Cuba. He will be traveling with us to Ireland, and then Kris [Powell's wife] and I will travel with him, he and his wife, to Cuba. Next year will be kind of fun, if the Cuba one goes—it's still a little touch-and-go because of—you know, politics and things like that.

[1:13:59]

This is the one thing about the Honors College—we get to do these types of courses. I do a course on Nietzsche, I do a course on Søren Kierkegaard. If I were in a traditional history department, I'd never get to teach those courses. One of my favorite classes I get to do is Cold War Culture through the lens of *The Planet of the Apes* movies—there's nine of them now. We watch all those, and it's one of the most fun courses. We do American culture, really in the '60s and '70s, through the lens of these movies, and the current ones. It's incredible. We read books on racial problems in the sixties and seventies, on the Vietnam War, the whole thing, and other issues—second-wave feminism, and these topics that are wonderful. But, I probably wouldn't be able to do that in a traditional history department, because they just wouldn't allow it. “We need you to teach these core classes, it's a great idea to do that but we just—” in the Honors College, we are encouraged to be creative like this and have fun with it.

[1:15:01]

Morton: It definitely sounds like you get a lot of flexibility granted to you from those in charge—

Powell: (laughs) Probably too much.

Morton: Thinking about those people, like Dean James Ruebel, who was dean from 2000 to 2016, and the current dean, John Emert, can you tell me a little bit more about your relationships with each of them, and how they influenced you as a professor?

Powell: When I came in 2008, Dr. Ruebel was the dean and Dr. Emert—it was his first year as associate dean, so we came in together in 2008. So that's all I knew for the

next eight years. Dr. Ruebel's leadership style—Dr. Ruebel was just one the nicest guys. He was just wonderful. His leadership style was very laidback, so if we presented an idea, he was like, "Eh, if you can make it work, go for it." It was just real casual.

[1:16:02]

Powell: As long as we could justify why we thought a course would be—from day one, students were asking me to do a *Harry Potter* colloq, and I think we're past that time. In 2008, everyone was asking me to do one. I read them, I liked it, but the student who asked me, she'd read the series seven times. If I've got to teach something, I've got to know at least one percent more than you do, and that's just never going to happen.

But, I talked to Ruebel about it. I said, "What do you think?" He goes, "Eh, I'm not sure, I think the time has sort of passed." And I said, "Yeah, I think so."

But, if we could justify it to him, he was okay. It was a more hands-off approach, but he set a culture where that was allowed, where Dr. Emert has followed that culture, but he's a little more proactive. He'll say, "Oh, I think we need—"

[1:17:01]

Powell: So he'll come to us and say, "Would you be interested in teaching something like this?" Where Dr. Ruebel was open to any ideas, but he was much more allowing us to do what we were interested in. Dr. Emert will be a little more proactive sometimes. He'll say, "You know what, would you be willing to teach a course like this?" It's just a different leadership style, a little bit, but both of them are so open to the different ideas we have, and they're fully on board.

Our new associate dean—Patti Lang was our interim associate dean for two years, after Dr. Ruebel had passed away and we were in transition, she was wonderful and open to ideas as well—and now Dr. [Amy] Livingstone is the exact same way.

As long as we can justify why this course will further the mission of exploration of ideas and cultures and these types of things, our leadership is on board.

[1:18:05]

Morton: Thinking about other honors faculty, I have to ask you about your friend, Professor Timothy Berg—

Powell: My buddy.

Morton: (laughs) Can you tell me about first meeting him? How that friendship came to

be?

Powell: When I first got hired, our offices were over in Burkhardt [Building]—or, in here, right down the hall—we were right next together [Powell’s cell phone rings]—I’m so sorry. It’s my daughter, I’m sorry.

Morton: I think that adds a good flavor to the interview.

Powell: (laughs) Oh, yeah.

[1:19:03]

Powell: Tim taught all Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and I taught every day. I taught two classes Tuesday/Thursday and two classes Monday/Wednesday/Friday. We’d run into each other sometimes, but that first year, we were also down in—the Honors College was in Carmichael. I’m sure you knew all this already. We were down there, so I didn’t see him a whole lot. As a matter of fact, our offices were still here for my first three years, maybe. I’m trying to think when they told us to get out (laughs), or when they had us move over. Because we started in the Honors College in 2009. They had a shared office for us over there [Ball Honors House], because of lack of space. I had one and a half offices at that point. I had my own here and a half one over there. Now I just have half an office.

[1:19:58]

I can’t remember what year it was—was it 2012, had I been here four years before they said, Look, we need your offices. So we went over there—so the first couple years, we’d hang out some. We’d go out for beers and talk about education. We got to be—we started getting to be friends, but it was when we moved in together, into the same office. At that point, I was teaching all Tuesday and Thursday and he was teaching Monday/Wednesday/Friday, so we would still go weeks without seeing each other, but we’d go out. We’d go out for beers and we’d just talk about life. Then we started talking about teaching, and we realized we both had very similar philosophies, we had very similar styles, just different personalities. A matter of fact, the way Tim described it—my favorite metaphor. He goes, “When I talk to my students, I spoon out what they need, and you’re like ‘bleh.’”

[1:21:00]

Powell: He goes, “Also, I keep my shirt tucked in yours just hangs out.” I said, “Shut up” (laughs). But, I would tease him back, usually because—he teaches a class on Eastern thought, and if I’d see him really hot under the collar, I’d say, “Tim, that’s not really Zen of you, is it?” He’d say, “Shut up.” I’d say, “Oh, I didn’t know Zens could have the veins popping out,” or Zen mind or whatever.

We started hanging out, and The Fickle Peach [a bar in downtown Muncie] is our

place. We'd start talking and our conversations would be three hours, until we're both—too late. It didn't take long before I thought, Huh, I really like this guy. I don't even really refer to Tim as my colleague, he's just one of my closest friends. We've shared things about our personal lives. Of course, we talk a lot about our professional lives, but it's always when we—I think Tim's like me. What we do in the classroom is meant to be a part of how we live as human beings. We both have that similar philosophy.

[1:22:18]

Powell: He's maybe a little more laidback in the approach than I am, just because of our different personalities. But, we both see it the same way—how do we make a difference in students' lives? I think I can say this honestly—no one has been more influential in who I am as a teacher than Tim Berg. I mean, no one. Over the conversations of eleven years, I've learned so much from him. I still have many flaws in my teaching, but in my moments of good teaching, so much of that is due to my conversations with him, and him modeling, and just immense creativity.

[1:23:06]

Powell: He's done a lot more of the legwork. He reads everything from assessments to different techniques and ideas. He's always sharing those with me so I don't have to read them. But, I take notes and get to learn all about the wonderful things he tries, and he's so innovative. He'll be very honest—he goes, “This seemed like a good idea in August, and now that it's the end of October, I don't like it so much.” I'll say, “Oh, well I'm not going to try it,” and we'll laugh.

But, he's always stepped out to try anything he can do to engage students. He's so great. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. I've tried some of those, sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but he's always the first one on the frontline to try innovative things or think in creative things on how to do that. I just get to sit there and reap the benefits of that in my relationship with him. He's been good for me, not just professionally, but personally as well. He's just my buddy.

[1:24:04]

Morton: In 2018, you taught the New York City class together. How was that experience, teaching with him?

Powell: It was wonderful teaching with him. I'm not convinced I like the whole set-up, because of teaching load. We both have to each teach our own classes. Because it was a colloq, we couldn't meet together more than half the time. I thought it was a wonderful group and a wonderful class, but we've got to find a way to do that better. But, I had a ball teaching with him. Setting up the course was a lot of fun, and of course, you guys were such a wonderful group. It felt a little choppy

because we were—half the time we were together, half the time we were apart. I just don't know if it ever—both of us feel like we didn't hit that cohesion, and some of the stuff we were reading, we thought we shouldn't have taught that.

[1:25:05]

Powell: We both enjoyed it thoroughly. We want to do it again, it's just, we have to think of a way to streamline it maybe a little bit better. It was more the logistics, but teaching with him is always fun.

Morton: You mentioned a minute or so ago that you still have flaws in your teaching. What do you think are some of your flaws in teaching?

Powell: I think one of the biggest ones is—and maybe other professors experience this as well—I feel like I can get into a rut, where I'm asking the same—not the same questions, but the same types of questions. I think, I need to be more creative. That's where Tim helps me out a lot, he works through that. But, I think that's one of the biggest things—I feel like sometimes, I can get into a rut.

[1:26:07]

Powell: There's other times where I think—so that's the first thing I think I struggle with. The other times, sometimes I'm afraid—I love to teach new things, but I'm afraid to step outside of my intellectual base. So this past year, I taught my first—in my 201—my first non-Western—we're trying to become globalized in our humanities approach—so I taught my first non-Western literature. I taught Chuang Tzu. It was okay—you guys had to read that in [Berg's] 189. It was okay, but I never felt comfortable with it. My heart wasn't into it as fully, as probably it should have been. I was a little—I wasn't like all gung ho.

[1:27:04]

Powell: I think I realized how much I like to stay in my comfort zone as well. I'm telling students to get out of their comfort zone, and yet, I will tend to stay in that myself. It's not that I don't want to, but I didn't feel like I had the time, necessarily, to do the research to really teach that text as effectively, and other texts that I hadn't taught before. Primarily because I don't know those cultures as well. I'm so steeped with—my philosophy background and history background—I'm so steeped in the Western world. I'm fascinated by the non-Western world, but I don't have the confidence. I need to step up and change that.

I think as far as what happens in classroom, I feel like I get into a rut. Then I just tell the students, "I feel like I'm in a rut. What should we do differently?" They'll tell me, Stop asking this. They're not afraid to tell me. I think those are probably two of the bigger ones. I'm afraid to step out of my own comfort zone at times, and sometimes I really get into a rut and I feel like I'm just not being very

innovative or creative in my approaches.

[1:28:17]

Morton: You mentioned—

Powell: There's probably a gazillion more, like in the heat of the moment, "I suck at this, too" (laughs).

Morton: You mentioned how you're trying to become more globalized in the humanities classes. So with that, and also talking about diversity, we've talked about a few changes that the Honors College could take. Are there any other things you wish you could maybe change about honors at Ball State?

Powell: As far as programming goes, of course the diversity thing is something—as far as programming goes, I think the one—matter of fact, it was a year ago I taught the first thesis class. I taught a class, I had twelve students in there who were doing their senior thesis with me, full-time. That was a course I taught. It was a great experience, but the thesis is such an odd experience.

[1:29:22]

Powell: Some students really get into it, other students are terrified of it. We've been doing a better job—nationwide, it's the number one reason students don't get their honors diploma, is the thesis. That's typically true, and probably even true here at Ball State. When I taught the class, probably eight of the students said, Of it wasn't for this class, I would have just dropped out [of honors]. It had nothing to do with me, some of them had no idea who I was. They said, I needed the class to keep me accountable. Otherwise, I just wouldn't have done it. I said, "I totally get that."

I'm not necessarily in favor of dropping the thesis, but I think we need to have a real discussion of, are there other options that maybe students could do instead of a thesis that would give them a greater benefit? Because some of them—I've had many thesis projects where I've pushed students, "You need to do a little more," and they just (shrugs). Their hearts were never into it. They're just done.

[1:30:27]

Powell: A lot of times, I've accepted theses that maybe weren't their best, but I thought, They did it, they're accomplished. I probably could have pushed them a little harder. Some of them aren't the best quality, others really are. I wonder if we can increase our options.

My other problem is—I teach online, but I'm not—my running joke is, "You know the difference between an honors online class and a non-honors online class

is? Absolutely nothing.”

They’re still smaller and things like that, but it’s—the Honors College is all about the discussion, and as we know, discussion boards on online classes are not a real successful experience. Students don’t like them and they treat them that way.

As a matter of fact, that was a conversation Tim and I had at The Fickle Peach on Friday night. We had a three-hour conversation—of course that turned into a conversation about life and all that stuff as well—but, we’re really trying to understand how to—so it’s not just a typical online course.

[1:31:32]

Powell: So I think we still need to have that discussion, what is the benefit of doing online courses? I’m doing my first online course next fall, during the semester. It’s designed for students like nursing students, whose schedule is just so awful, they can’t—I’m doing my *Planet of the Apes* colloq online. We’ll see how it goes.

Morton: On that note, looking ahead, what are your academic aspirations for the future?

Powell: I never thought I would spend my career here in Muncie, Indiana. But, I’ve been here eleven years, I’m 52—my wife’s 52 today, I’m not yet 52. I’m 51. I’m 51 years old, so no one’s banging down my door, “Please come teach at our university right now.” The problem is, now that I’m invested in the Muncie community much more, I see my career ending up here.

[1:32:34]

Powell: If I left Muncie, I’d want to take the Honors College with me. Pick up the house and move it. I would like to teach at Ball State’s Honors College in Seattle, Washington, but that’s probably not going to happen.

I’m very content, if they’ll have me, on finishing my career here, and just continuing to develop those courses. I’m also working on my own research still, doing those things.

But, I think starting this non-profit with this wonderful group of students is going to help me invest more into the community, and not just here at Ball State.

Morton: Another question—on a slightly more personal note—I wanted to ask about your son’s Honors College experience, because he is now in the Honors College at Ball State.

[1:33:28]

Powell: He’s a junior in the Honors College. As far as I know—I’ve asked him, “Do you

like the Honors College?” And he really has. He’s really bonded with Obed. He’s doing a fellowship with Obed, he’s taken most of his honors core with Obed. He went to Mexico, taking Obed’s class. It’s been wonderful, and of course, Obed is another wonderful friend of mine.

I think he’s enjoyed it, very much so. I’ve always asked him, because he lived in Deho [Dehority Complex, the honors-only student housing] for two years, and I thought, Oh, did you get any flak? He goes, “No, people knew you were my dad. It was kind of weird, but I developed my own identity. No one was hard on me or anything like that.” Most people think he looks like me, but I’m way better-looking (laughs).

[1:34:28]

Powell: I try and really—he lived in Deho for the first year, now he’s back home, just for money purposes, but we like him there and he likes us. We try and give him all the space and let him do his thing. I think he would say that his honors courses have probably been his favorite courses.

Morton: Did you always know that he would end up in the Honors College at Ball State?

Powell: No—for years, he wanted to go into the meteorology program here. He was fascinated by weather. When he was in high school, he took some government and history classes, and he goes, “I like science, but I don’t have an affinity for it.” He really loves history, history and poly sci, so that’s what he’s focusing on here. I didn’t push him to be a historian, but we always had the books around, and I had him reading history, saying, “Think about this.” I never tried to force it on him, but he really loves history.

[1:35:29]

Powell: Probably more of that influence came from a high school teacher in history that he really liked, because, like, “History is what my dad does,” but he really kind of fell in love with it. He’s done quite well.

Morton: On a broader scale, this is a question I’ve been asked in your class, so I want to ask it to you now.

Powell: (laughs)

Morton: I want to ask; how do you see the world?

Powell: How do I see—did I ask that?

Morton: Yeah.

Powell: Oh, how do you see—we did do that. That’s one of my—we did it in our New York colloq as well. The way I see the world. I usually start out by answering this question—because this is a question I ask my classes—by talking about how my wife sees the world, because she’s an artist. She came back to school when we—she went here, so she graduated with her bachelor of fine arts in 2015.

[1:36:26]

Powell: She is extremely—what she calls “presently tactile.” She is in touch with her five senses like no one I have ever met. I’ve seen her taste plants. She touches everything, she smells everything. All her senses are engaged. It’s the opposite of me. I am not in touch with—I am so conceptual. I am lost in my head almost all the time. I see the world conceptually, and a lot of it is aesthetic. I’m very influenced by my environment. I can’t study in ugly rooms.

But, I’m also a very emotional person. I think about everything, but everything I think about really affects me deeply. It’s not always a real pleasant experience.

[1:37:28]

Powell: So if there’s a tree in a yard, my wife will go up and touch it and feel the leaves, and I’ll look at the tree and think, Why is it here? What’s the meaning of life? Is there a God? Those are literally the things I think about. We have two different ways of seeing the world. I see the world always as a way of—everything is trying to ask the big questions, what is the nature of being?

Morton: Can you tell us your wife’s full name and maiden name?

Powell: Kristina Marie Powell. Kristina with a “K”—that always gets messed up. Her maiden name was Kristina Marie Dodd. Even though I was very conservative back when we got married in 1989, I said, “Do you want to keep your own last name or do you want to hyphenate?” She goes, “No, I’ll take yours.” I thought, Huh, thanks for the vote of confidence.

[1:38:29]

Powell: We both have degrees from the Bible college in the eighties, and I went back to Calvin to kind of erase that past, and she came back here to Ball State. Because she was not accredited, she had to go the full—she had to take everything here. She started all over, from the beginning. She got the tuition benefits and those types of things, so she got to get her degree in fine arts and had a wonderful experience here.

She was also in the Honors College, which was really fun. The first time when she started, and I found out she was going to be in the Honors College, I went in and I just said to one of my classes, “I just want to let you guys know, I’m

sleeping with an honors student,” and I just left it like that. And I said, “All right, take out your texts,” and they were like, No (laughs). I thought it would just be more fun to say that without any context whatsoever.

It was true (laughs).

Morton: You were talking about how, when you first got married, how you were a bit more conservative, and we kind of talked about your religious issues over life—what is your relationship now with religion?

[1:39:42]

Powell: So—this is a little—it’s been a bizarre journey. For about twenty years, after I left my denomination and left my faith, I called myself an agnostic, but I was probably much more on the atheistic side. But, I don’t like using the term “agnostic” because a lot of people, “I’m an agnostic means I don’t care.” It was something—it may be because of my background—I thought about God every day. That’s not an exaggeration. I was still so steeped in really trying to understand, was there a way to reformulate an understanding of God that was much more *not* what I had been raised with.

[1:40:39]

Powell: I think part of my interest in teaching Latin America—because I knew one of the big forces in Latin America was liberation theology—basically, theology of the poor, Marxist theology. The first time I taught my 189, we read the foundational texts in liberation theology as a class. I didn’t believe in—I really did not believe in God at that time. I was an agnostic, but I was probably ninety-eight percent atheistic, but I was still thinking about these things. So we read the texts, and I was so blown away, this whole new way to envision how God may be interacting with the world.

[1:41:25]

Powell: I started reading a lot more liberation theology and liberation philosophy and this notion, rather than this God that is against everything or this God that is petty and small and is just worried about our sexual sins—but this God that is trying to understand the full dynamics of what it is to be a human being and full flourishing and a theology that God is trying to have us encounter and bring justice to any marginalized group, whether it’s the poor, whether it’s racial oppression or the LGBTQ community. But, I still had a very scientific view of the world, like, “We don’t need God,” but it was horrifying, because I really was struggling to balance it with nihilism. If there is nothing after, then what’s the meaning of any decision I make?

[1:42:30]

Powell: Actually, it was the New York trip in 2015, I took a book that I'd read, it was one of Thomas Merton's—he's a great Catholic mystic—and I read that in Washington Square Park in New York City. I'd read it fifteen years before and was like, "Eh, it's all right." I reread it and it was the first time twenty years that I was—after I read it—I was at least open up again to the possibility of God—that saying that there couldn't be a God was me being arrogant and hubris, and I understood reality—that's what the book says. How can I say understand how reality is? It was the first time I was open to the possibility of there being a God. Thomas Merton, who was a Catholic—I'd been reading Catholic philosophy and theology, so I became a Catholic (laughs). That was three years ago that I officially became a Catholic, but I still call myself an agnostic. So I'm an agnostic Catholic.

[1:43:33]

Powell: So I don't know what that means. But, in the sense of—I don't ever say, "This is what I believe," because I can talk myself out of it, so all I say is I'm open to the possibility, but if there is a God, it is a God truly of love and beauty and justice. A God that demands that we encounter the world in the full spectrum of trying to bring flourishing and authentic human experience to everyone. So now, starting this year, we do a liberation theology reading group for LGBTQ students. It has really been a remarkable time. We're reading a feminist liberation theology written in 1993 called *She Who Is* [by Elizabeth A. Johnson], and it won about every award out there for a book on religion. It's really a dynamic text. We chew it apart, we go line-by-line through some of the passages, it's really amazing.

[1:44:28]

Powell: We're trying to understand; how do we encounter this possibility of this God? I don't tell them what to believe. I don't know what I believe half the time. So there it is.

Morton: The reading group kind of touches on this, but I was wondering—the topics of spirituality and the meaning of life and all these things come up a lot in humanities honors courses and different courses as well. So I was wondering how your religious experiences have affected your teaching of those topics?

Powell: I try and keep religion and politics out of my classes. No one wants to hear—you know. Sometimes, I'll have a student who knows that I go to church, they'll say, "Do you go to church? Are you a Catholic?" And I'll go, "Yeah," and, of course, then they all want to hear the story or whatever. And I'll say, "Can we talk about it over coffee? I don't want to talk about it now." So I tend not to—I don't know if we ever talked about it in 199—

[1:45:37]

Powell: I think a lot of it is, how do we call ourselves a Christian nation and just abuse everyone? So that's usually what I'll talk about. But, I think it's given me a sense of—if there's a God, and I don't know if there is a God—but if there is a God, and what this God desires is human flourishing and love and justice at that level, and thinking in those terms, how do I communicate that in non-religious terms? The idea is, how do I infuse all those ideas? I don't know if you know this—the consumerism class you took [HONR 199] was my response to the Trump election. I don't want to talk about him, but I wanted to have a class that was against everything he believes in.

[1:46:30]

Powell: It really was. That's how it was conceived. I just thought, I don't want to talk about him, I don't want to deal with it, but I want to have a class that addresses this whole American consumerism and wealth and everything, and that whole mindset. That was my way of having a political class without it being political.

I don't know if that makes any sense. But I do the same in my humanities course. We discuss religious texts, I don't talk about my experience or my—I try not to, ever. And we read a lot of texts from atheists. I just try and let the texts speak. If students ask me, I'll tell them, but I don't—you know (shrugs).

Morton: Before we finish up, I wanted to ask if there was anything you wanted to talk about today that we didn't get to.

Powell: I think you asked about everything (laughs). I can't imagine—well, I should say, this is my final note about being a Catholic.

[1:47:32]

Powell: I disagree with, like, ninety-nine percent of what they believe (laughs). I don't even know why I go. It really is liberation theology, but all their other conservative—I'm just not there. But, they don't know that. I just keep my mouth shut. So when I go to Mass, it's to have my own notion of transcendence. How do I do this without—you know. So I should—I would make that qualification, because I think true Catholicism is about love—I really do—and justice, and not that other stuff about making all these rules.

Morton: Well, I'm glad you got that on the record.

Powell: (laughs) I did, I did. I would usually add that. I can't believe I got into my own spirituality—shit.

Morton: With that, we will bring our interview to an end. On behalf of the Ball State University Honors College Oral History project, I want to thank you, Jason, for

participating in our project.

Powell: Thank you.

End of interview



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5 April 2019

Jason Powell, Ph.D.
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Dear Professor Powell,

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to you for taking the time to speak with me for the Ball State University Honors College Oral History Project. It was fascinating to hear about your life and time in the Honors College.

I especially enjoyed hearing your thoughts on diversity within the college. It's clear that you are passionate about incorporating perspectives in the classroom that generally go unheard. Anyone who views this oral history will be able to see how committed you are to inclusion and equality.

Thank you again for your dedication to honors education at Ball State and for your willingness to assist in our efforts to preserve the stories of the Honors College.

Best regards,

Margo Morton